The Negro in Southern Agriculture

The Plantation, Sharecropping, Farm Labor, Land Ownership, Mechanization, and Living Standards since World War II

by Victor Perlo

THE NEGRO IN SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

WIDESPREAD PROPAGANDA PICTURES a new South in which the Negro people are gaining real freedom, modern industry is growing, the old plantation system is breaking up, sharecroppers are becoming landowners, and the mule and the cotton patch are yielding to mechanized, diversified farming.

Important technical changes are taking place. Industry is growing, although not in a balanced way. Cotton culture has declined, and in some areas mechanization of agriculture has proceeded rapidly.

What about the crucial question of social relations? Results of the 1950 Census of Agriculture, and other sources, yield a negative answer. There have been social changes, but there has been no social transformation.

The position of the Negro people in southern agriculture has not improved. The great majority continue to be exploited in the same old way as sharecroppers and landless laborers. And the bulk of the white farm population remains poor. There are fewer old-style plantations with a score or more of cropper families. But the sharecropping system remains the principal form of exploitation of farm labor. Large areas have been converted to grazing land. But cotton and tobacco remain the decisive farm products in value and in employment of labor.

Machines have not liberated the rural poor from their poverty. They have removed hundreds of thousands from the land through the reduction in labor requirements. The displaced Negro sharecroppers have become landless laborers, or have migrated in search of work. The displaced white sharecroppers and poor farm owners have become low-wage factory hands in the southern run-away shops.

Agriculture is dominated by larger but fewer giant farms and plantations, many of them absentee-owned. The "independent, family-sized farm"—the dream farm of official propaganda

—remains a dream. The sharecroppers and farm laborers have not been able to "climb the ladder" to become independent farm owners. The statistics which show an increased number of owner-operators conceal the identity of these new operators. They are mainly city workers who have purchased small plots in the country, so that they and their family can raise food to supplement their inadequate wages.

Most important, through all of the changes, technical and social, the Negro rural population has suffered most from the losses, and profited least from the gains. Their disadvantages, as compared with the whites, have increased all along the line.

In the old South—the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana—the Negro people perform the bulk of the farm work, and continue to suffer extreme poverty and social indignity. From this base, poverty spreads far and wide—to a considerable portion of the white rural population and to the growing southern urban working class. Also, with the growing competition between southern and northern industry, poverty in the South exerts a stronger downward pull on the conditions of workers all over the country. Monopoly capital in the United States finds this of great use, as a weapon to increase the exploitation of labor in all parts of the country, especially in the South where more and more big northern capital is moving. And this same big capital derives an increasing share of the extra profit from the extreme exploitation of southern farm labor, as a result of absentee ownership of farms, and also of the increased scope of a few large farm processing, financing, fertilizer, and farm equipment companies.

All this is of extreme political importance. The U.S. government, attempting to extend its economic and military power to much of the colonial world of Asia and Africa, tells the people that it does so to reform the notorious colonial and feudal agrarian structure in its own, "non-communist" way. The American people, before supporting such adventures at the cost of enormous blood and treasure, would do well to observe that these same forces have not accomplished an iota of genuine agrarian reform right here in their own backyard. From this it follows that talk of reform abroad is sheer hypocrisy, that the real objective is to protect a rotten agrarian structure from reform

here and *abroad,* hardly a worthy object for sacrifice by the American people.

The prime sources of reaction in the United States are the great trusts of industry and finance, the profiteers from war and Taft-Hartleyism. The rural South remains one of their decisive bastions—if not *the* outstanding stronghold of extreme political reaction. The role of southerners in Congress, elected by a minority of white voters, is known well enough. They led in starting and building up the pro-fascist witch-hunts now carried forward by the McCarthyites. They provide the most unified support for anti-labor laws sponsored by the National Association of Manufacturers and war instigators in high places.

With all the growth of southern industry, with all the gains made by the Negro people in their struggle for the right to vote, the overlordship of the feudal-capitalist rural mogul remains the barrier to a decisive change in southern politics. This is not only true in Georgia, where the County Unit system brings to power a Eugene Talmadge on the basis of the votes of part of the rural white population, but throughout the South.

The Southern Regional Council found that the rapid gains in Negro voting in the South slowed down in 1948. Further gain up to 1952 was "disappointing"; Negro registration is only half, proportionately, that of white. "At present," the Council reported, "there is a 'cold war of the ballot' in the rural areas where Negroes make up a large part of the population. Most Negroes in these sections are tenant farmers or hired laborers, whose landlords do not look kindly on Negro voting. . . ." Disfranchisement of the rural half of the southern Negro population suffices to maintain the "southern bourbons" in power: "The overall lack of substantial Negro representation at the polls has deprived the Negro of a bargaining power to promote impartial treatment in civic gains and it has also helped the 'unscrupulous politicians who use race prejudice as a campaign weapon.'"

The social backwardness of southern agriculture sets the barrier to social and political progress in the South, and increasingly to social and political progress in the nation as a whole.

The South remains our "number one economic problem," as President Franklin D. Roosevelt so aptly said almost twenty

years ago, and our number one political problem as well. The oppression of the Negro people in the South is at the basis of this number one problem. And this oppression is rooted in southern agriculture, the direct descendant of the pre-Civil War slave economy.

Progressive and liberal forces throughout the country must give this their attention, give aid to the rural poor, especially the Negro rural poor, striving for better conditions and genuine reform in the South; or they will find this barrier in their way no matter what the objective—the extension of labor organization to southern industry, the abolition of discrimination in industry, North and South, the reversal of the trend to fascism and the restoration of civil liberties, and finally the stopping of the drive to war and atomic destruction.

The pioneer detailed study of the character of modern southern agriculture, and the special position of the Negro people in it, was made by James S. Allen in *The Negro Question in the United States,* published in 1936. Valuable contributions were made by the economist Arthur Raper, the specialists of the Works Progress Administration, and others during the New Deal period. The most important postwar work has been Harry Haywood's *Negro Liberation,* which brought out in full depth the special character of the exploitation of the Negro people in the South, and its national significance.

Mr. Haywood was forced to rely mainly on prewar data. The purpose of this book is to bring the analysis of the agrarian system up to date, and to answer some questions raised by the postwar trends in southern agriculture.

Statistics are derived mainly from the *U.S. Census of Agriculture,* 1950, Volume I, "State Reports".* These are supplemented by data contained in the *U.S. Census of Population, 1950,* Chapter B, "State Reports";** in *Census of Agriculture, 1950,* Volume V, Part 2, "Multiple-Unit Operations"; and in various special subject reports of the Department of Agriculture, the Tuskegee Institute, southern agricultural experiment stations, and papers in the *Journal of Farm Economics.*

* Designated in source notes as *Agriculture.*
** Designated in source notes as *Population.*

This study is confined mainly to six states of the old South—North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. These are the states of King Cotton and tobacco. All of them, except for a small part of North Carolina, are included by the Census in the "multiple-unit" or plantation-sharecropper region. Within these six states lie most of the sizable "Black Belt" areas in which Negroes are a majority of the population. While most examples are limited to these six states, the conditions described apply also to an important part of Arkansas, and to sections of Virginia, Florida, Texas, Missouri, and Tennessee.

There are frequent references to the forms of tenure of farmers. Because of the complexity of these forms in the South, some definitions are presented here:

A *full owner* is a farmer who owns all the land he operates.

A *part owner* owns part and rents part of the land. He is apt to be larger, more commercialized, than the full owner, having rented land in addition to his basic holding.

A *manager* operates a farm for an absentee owner.

A *cash tenant* rents for cash.

A *sharecropper* is a tenant who pays all or part of his rent in the form of a share of the crops.

There are several types of sharecroppers:

A *cropper* is the most exploited of the sharecroppers. He owns no means of production. The landlord supplies the workstock (usually a mule), and all farm supplies. Generally the cropper is charged with half the cost of these supplies, and is credited with half the value of the crop. He works under close landlord supervision. The landlord tells him what to plant and where, assigns him to whichever farm unit he pleases. The landlord markets the crop and manages the entire farm business.

A *crop-share tenant* owns some means of production. He supplies the mule or tractor. However, the landlord usually handles the business end, the supplies and the marketing. Usually the crop-share tenant is charged with two-thirds of the costs and credited with two-thirds of the crop.

A *livestock-share tenant* has a similar arrangement with livestock instead of crops. A *share-cash tenant* pays part cash, part

in crops. A *standing renter* pays a fixed amount of crop as rent, instead of a fixed percentage.

A *plantation* consists of a large farming enterprise, run as a single undertaking, but divided into a number of smaller units. The largest unit, or *home farm*, is often the home of the plantation owner or manager, and is worked by wage labor. The smaller units are occupied by sharecroppers, who also supply some of the wage labor for the home farm. The Census uses the term *multiple-unit operation* to cover plantations and smaller plantation-like farms with only two or three units.

I. AGRICULTURE AND THE NEGRO PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH

DESPITE THE RECENT growth of industry, the South is still largely agrarian. It produces the bulk or all of the country's cotton, tobacco, rice, peanuts, cane sugar and turpentine. The first three are among the five "basic crops" designated by Congress.

Farming is the leading occupation. In the six states studied here the total number of people employed in agriculture exceeds the total number employed in manufacturing. Moreover, the decisive southern industries are engaged in the primary processing of raw materials provided by southern agriculture. Southern cotton goes into southern textile fabric mills. Southern lumber, much of it cut on southern farms, goes into local sawmills, and some of it is further processed in furniture and veneer factories. Southern tobacco goes into southern cigarette factories.

Industry in the old South retains the character of industry in most of the less developed countries of the world. In North Carolina 79% of all manufacturing workers were in the textile and wood product industries in 1950; in South Carolina 77%. The principal centers of varied industry are in Northern Alabama (mining and steel), and the new area of petroleum and chemical production in Louisiana. Even in these states, primary processing of farm and forest products accounts for most manufacturing employment.[1]

The people in southern industry are also closely connected with agriculture. In Mississippi 59% of all manufacturing workers live in rural areas, and 23% live on farms. In Georgia 48% of all manufacturing workers live in rural areas, and 15% live on farms.[2]

In the six states, the Negro people provide most of the labor

for farm production, especially that labor yielding substantial direct profits to owners of large-scale farms and plantations.

The Negro Labor Force

The 1950 *Census of Population* shows 825,903 white people and 701,481 Negro people employed in agriculture in the six states, with the Negro people thus comprising 45.9% of the total.[8] However, the percentage of the total farm labor supplied by the Negro people is much larger than this. The 1950 Census admittedly failed to count several million workers, particularly Negro workers. Also most farm wage laborers are Negroes, and the Census was taken in April, when employment for farm laborers is far below peak. In addition, the Census tabulation excludes children less than 14 years of age. The Agriculture Department estimates that two million such children are employed in agriculture. The employment of child labor is most extensive in the South, and is inflicted most on the Negro children. Finally, a considerable number of the white people engaged in agriculture are not laboring people, but managers of large establishments, owners of sizable farms who depend wholly or almost wholly on wage labor and cropper labor, foremen and plantation overseers.

It would be fruitless to attempt precise adjustments for all of these points. But there can be no doubt that in their combined effect, they would show the Negro people providing not less, but more than half of all farm labor in these six southern states.

The importance of Negro labor becomes more apparent if attention is concentrated on the large commercial farms and plantations—less than 5% of the total—which account for roughly 60% of the value of marketed farm production (See Chapter V). These decisive farms depend mainly on wage laborers and croppers, and to a lesser extent on other types of sharecroppers. The Negro people supply almost two-thirds of this basic labor force, as shown in Table 1.

Addition of extra family workers on cropper farms would further swell the percentage of Negro workers in the total. Negroes comprise a majority of the total of farm wage laborers and croppers combined in each of the six states.

TABLE 1. WAGE LABORERS, CROPPERS AND OTHER SHARECROPPERS IN SIX SOUTHERN STATES, 1950

	Negro	*White*	*Total*	*% Negro of Total*
Wage laborers	167,479	95,130	262,609	63.8
Croppers	158,417	85,067	243,484	65.1
Total	325,896	180,197	506,093	64.4
Other Sharecroppers	94,550	121,335	215,885	43.8
Grand Total	420,446	301,532	721,978	58.2

(Source: Wage laborers from *Population*, Table 28a, other items from *Agriculture*, State Table 14.)

If agriculture is the leading industry in the South generally, it is peculiarly the leading industry of the Negro people. It is not only that roughly 3 out of 5 Negro people live in the country, and 2 out of 5 live on farms. Also, the Negro people, largely cut off from Jim-Crow southern industries, are limited to agriculture in a way that does not apply to white people.

In South Carolina, where the Dixiecrat leader, Governor James Byrnes, boasts of the rapid development of industry, the contrast is most striking. Here, in 1950, there were more than three times as many white workers in manufacturing as in agriculture; but more than three times as many Negro workers in agriculture as in manufacturing.[4]

In the six states, the number of Negro household servants considerably exceeds the number of Negro factory workers. Thus the Negroes driven off the land are forced into the most menial occupations or into unemployment. The problem of agrarian reform is not only a general southern problem, but most distinctly a special need of the Negro people.

Not only do the Negro people supply the majority of the labor for commercial agriculture in the South, but they are the most exploited, and supply an even greater portion of the total profit.

In analyzing southern conditions, many fail to distinguish between poor whites and Negroes. Raper, who in many of his writings points out the differences, at times falls into this trap, as when he writes: "Plantation owners do not have tenant houses

for whites and tenant houses for Negroes—they have tenant houses."[5]

He emphasizes that "nearly two-thirds of all farm-tenant families were white" in the South as a whole, and finds that "the land-tenure system, worked out to train, supervise, and keep the Negro 'in his place,' is now penalizing nearly twice as many Southern white families as Negro families—and the living conditions of tenants have not improved."[6]

It is true that the oppression of the Negro people penalizes not only southern white farm families, but all southern white working class families. This is important, because it establishes the unity of interest of the white working people with the Negro people. But it is equally important to recognize the *systematic differences in the South,* which have been established for the precise purpose of hiding that unity of interest.

The figure of two-thirds whites among tenant farmers in "the South as a whole" can be misleading. The South includes vast areas where very few Negroes live, and in which the conditions of tenant farmers, and especially their relations with landlords, are decidedly different from those in the old plantation region. As we have seen, in the six states typical of that region, almost two-thirds of the lowest category of farm tenants are Negroes, and a considerable majority of all tenants, despite the fact that sizable non-plantation, almost all-white areas within these states are included.

Furthermore, at any level, whether it be that of cropper, share tenant, wage laborer, or farm owner, there is a customary difference, whereby the Negro is pushed down further than the white. Of course, there are individual poor whites just as badly off as most Negroes, and individual Negro farmers better off than the average poor white. But all of the recent data reinforce Harry Haywood's conclusion:

> . . . Any attempt to place the status of southern "poor whites" on a par with that of Negroes is false. Beyond all doubt, the oppression of the Negro, which is the basis of the degradation of the "poor whites," is of a separate character demanding a special approach. . . .
>
> Raper found that Negroes were concentrated in the lower tenure groups. But this is not all. *Within each group in each county* they were much weaker than the corresponding white group: the size of the farms, quality of the soil, amount of livestock and equipment, income, housing, and education.[7]

If anything, the difference between Negro and white at the same tenure level have increased since Haywood wrote.

Population and Migration

The Negro people are about one-third of the total population in the six states studied. The 1950 Census showed 11,723,000 whites and 5,826,000 Negroes. For the past sixty years there has been substantial migration of the Negro people from the prison-like conditions of the South. In 1890 the number of Negroes in the six states almost equaled the number of whites. There were large majorities of Negroes in South Carolina and Mississippi, a small majority in Louisiana. The migration of Negroes to the North reached a peak around World War I, and a similar peak around World War II. Migration of the Negro people during the past twenty years has almost balanced the natural growth of population, so that there has been little increase in the total Negro population in the old South. At the same time the white population has increased substantially, so that the proportion of whites increased, and that of Negroes declined. Between 1940 and 1950 the Negro population in the six states increased 0.2%, while the white population increased 15.4%. The proportion of Negroes in the total population fell from 36.4% to 33.2%.[8]

This migration has led to an important redistribution of the Negro people in the United States, and to a major growth of the Negro working class, especially in the North and West. At the same time the number of Negro people in the old South has remained stable.

War-boom conditions during most of the past decade opened up unusual job opportunities in northern and western industries. In the event of a decline in employment possibilities, migration would decline, and the Negro population in the old South may again increase. This becomes more apparent when the character of the migration is considered. The migrants have been mainly young men and women in the twenties and thirties, either childless or leaving their families behind. The ghettoes in the northern cities, and the low earnings of Negro workers do not create favorable conditions for bringing up children. At the same time, the improvement in jobs and farm prices dur-

ing the last decade, accompanied by improvement in medical attention, especially at child-birth, "trickled down" to some extent to the Negro people in the South, permitting a considerable increase in the birthrate.

Thus while the total Negro population in the six states remained virtually unchanged, the number of Negro children less than five years old increased 25.5%. There was also a sizable rise in the number of Negro children aged 5 to 9. Negro children under 5 comprise 38.0% of all very young children, as compared with the 33.2% of Negroes in the total population of the six states.[9]

Today there are 225,000 Negro people in South Carolina aged 20-39, the most productive working years. But there are 420,000 or nearly twice as many, aged less than 20.[10] These will be 20-39 year olds in 1970. Either there will have to be more migration than ever, or there will be a sharp increase in the Negro working population of the old South.

Thus it is clear that migration is not solving the special oppression of the Negro people in the South. The suffering of the Negro people in the South must be cured in the South, and this must be seen as a nation-wide problem.

The population statistics lead to another important conclusion. There has been no diminution during the past decade in the relative role of the Negro people in southern agriculture. Among the Negro people as among the whites there has been a rapid flight from farm to town and village. But this movement has been of similar magnitude for whites and Negroes. The proportion of Negroes among the population engaged in farming has not changed—or may have increased.

Between 1940 and 1950 the Negro farm population declined 26%, the white farm population 23.1% in the six states. The proportion of Negroes in the total farm population fell from 41.7% to 40.4%.[11] However, this fall is more apparent than real. As will be seen (Chapter VIII), there has been a rapid *increase* in the number of white people living on farms but working in the towns. This applies to a much smaller extent to the Negro farm people. Also, there are increasing numbers of Negro town and village dwellers who are farm laborers, migratory or seasonal workers. Consequently there has been an actual increase in

the proportion of Negro people among all those who earn their living mainly from agriculture.

The potential increase in the proportion of Negroes among the farm population of working age is especially marked. In 1940, 46.7% of all farm children less than five years old were Negroes. By 1950 this proportion had increased to 49.0% in the six states as a whole, and to more than 60% in South Carolina and Mississippi.[12]

From these facts it follows that conditions in southern agriculture are of decisive importance to the Negro people in the South. The Negro farm population, even more than the white farm population, is threatened by the sharp decline in farm employment, which shows no sign of abating.

During the past decade the majority of young farm people reaching working age have left the farm. But the whites have moved mainly into non-farm jobs in the South, while the Negroes have moved almost entirely out of the South. An example is provided by tracing the South Carolina males who were aged 15-19 in 1940, and became of full-time working age during the ensuing decade. Three-fifths of the whites and two-thirds of the Negroes left the farm. But of those who left, only 20% of the whites, as compared with over 90% of the Negroes, left South Carolina.[13]

A chronic surplus of farm population, the movement from farm to city, is characteristic of capitalism. It is especially acute in the present-day South. While the surplus white population may move more freely into southern industrial jobs, the opportunities here are limited for Negroes, who must migrate to other regions.

In time of depression, when industrial jobs decline in the South and the North, the surplus population has nowhere to go. The evicted farm workers then face the imminent threat of starvation.

Thus the study of conditions in southern agriculture must have in mind these problems: What is necessary to *increase* the opportunities for earning a livelihood in agriculture, especially for the Negro people? What is necessary to *increase* the opportunities in southern industry, and open them up on an equal basis to the Negro people?

II. THE NEGRO FARM WORKER AND THE LAND

THE NEGRO PEOPLE, who supply most of the work in Southern agriculture, have little stake in the fruits of their labor. As previously noted, the Negro people are officially reported as comprising 45.9% of all people employed in agriculture in the six southern states studied. They operate 33.2% of the farms, which account for 24.5% of the value of farm products sold and contain 16.5% of the total farm land. What is most striking of all, *Negro farmers own only 6.5% of the farm land in the six states.*

Negroes are 65.1% of all croppers. But they are only 15.3% of all full owners. And the Negro owners have smaller farms, poorer in every respect than those of the white owners. Thus the average size of a Negro full owner farm in South Carolina is 51.1 acres, as compared with 119.7 acres for a white full owner farm. The average size of farm of Negro full owners is less than that of the average size of farm of white farmers of all tenure categories except croppers. Even white crop-share farmers have, on the average, larger farms than Negro full owners.[1]

The average value of farm land and buildings of a "commercial" Negro full owner (excluding the smallest) is $3,746, as compared with $10,696 for white full owners. The average value of farm land and buildings for the Negro full owners is less than that for every single category of white farmer, including the white croppers.[2]

Official "Land Reform"

Apologists for current conditions argue that no matter how bad things are, they are getting better. What progress is being made in the land tenure of the Negro farmers in the South, if any? Not only the American people, but the entire world is in-

terested in the answer. The main content of official U.S. foreign policy is the building of military bases and preparation for war against those countries which have accomplished land reform on a vast scale (the U.S.S.R., China, the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe). But Washington tries to win support for this war program by posing as the genuine, democratic advocate of land reform.

President Truman said in 1950: "We know that the peoples of Asia have problems of social injustice to solve. They want their farmers to own their land and to enjoy the fruits of their toil. That is one of our great national principles also. We believe in the family-size farm. That is the basis of our agriculture and has strongly influenced our form of government."[3]

Isador Lubin, U.S. representative to the U.N. Economic and Social Council, told that body: "In the United States it has always been our belief that the man who tills the soil should own it . . . our goal . . . remains . . . to increase the number of farmer owners of family-size farms."[4]

To prove his point, Lubin cited figures showing that the number of sharecroppers in the United States dropped from 776,000 in 1930 to 447,000 in 1945. But he did not cite figures to show that these former sharecroppers had moved up to the status of "family-sized" landowners. He could not. What happened is that the croppers, especially the Negro croppers, were "reformed" off the land altogether. They were converted into landless, homeless farm laborers, or migrated to the cities in search of work.

President F. D. Patterson of Tuskegee Institute, summarized the results as follows: "Of the 622,000 farm tenants who were eliminated from agriculture between 1930 and 1945, 223,000 or 35% were Negroes. Of the increase of 270,000 farm owners, only 11,000 or 4.07% were Negroes. Undue hardships, even tragedy, become the lot of too many of these displaced farmers and their families. They are less prepared for earning a living in industry and commerce than they were in agriculture."[5]

The decline in the number of sharecroppers signifies not land reform, but unemployment. Ernest E. Neal, another Tuskegee official, aptly commented: "Attitudes toward Negroes have changed as economic circumstances dictated. In areas where

once all sorts of obstructions were placed in the way of Negroes desiring to move, now Negroes are being evicted and plantation cabins are being demolished with no anticipation of their return. This emancipation from the plantation system comes not from moral or ethical exhortation, but from the rumble of a tractor doing the work of several plowmen."[6]

There were small gains in Negro farm ownership, and larger gains in white farm ownership during World War II. Farm prices rose rapidly. Some farm land became available as operators went into the Army. The Roosevelt Administration advanced credits to some farm tenants to enable them to purchase land. Under the influence of the New Deal and the anti-fascist character of the war, a few Negro farmers were able to share in these benefits.

But with the end of the war and the reversal of the New Deal policies, an opposite trend set in. The number of Negro owners, the total number of Negro farmers, and the acreage occupied by Negro farmers all declined, the last two sharply.

Between 1945 and 1950 there was an increase of 3,000 in the number of white farmers, but a decrease of 67,000, or 14% in the number of Negro farmers in the six states studied. There was an increase of 11 million acres, or 13%, in the land occupied by white farmers, but a decrease of 3 million acres, or 14%, in the land occupied by Negro farmers. The increase in land occupied by white farmers would have been enough to provide a 50% rise in the land of Negro farmers. The U. S. Government, in the "land reform" programs it sponsors in other countries, stresses the turning over of unused land to poor peasants, in order to avoid struggles between peasants and landlords. Here was a chance to do this very thing in the United States. Obviously, such an approach would require turning over the bulk of the 8 million extra acres to the most oppressed Negro farmers. Instead, not only was the entire 8 million acres added to the holdings of white farmes, but in addition 3 million acres of the small area previously occupied by Negro farmers was taken over by whites. As will be shown, it was taken over not by small "family-sized" white farmers, but by large business enterprises.

Trends in Land Ownership

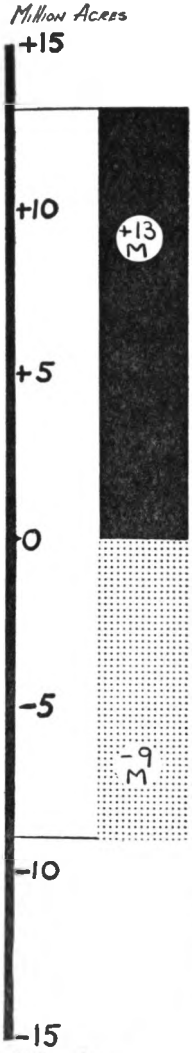
These recent changes resume a long-time trend which has prevailed since World War I—the displacement of the Negro farmer from the land, accompanied by sizable migration from the southern countryside. But the trend has been accelerated. Between 1920 and 1940 there was an average decline of 8,000 Negro farm operators per year, and 300,000 acres per year in the land occupied by Negro operators in the six states. Between 1945 and 1950 the average annual decline in the number of Negro operators was 13,000, and in the land occupied by Negro operators 600,000 acres. Since World War II the Negro farmers are losing land occupancy twice as rapidly as between the two world wars.

In 1920 Negro farmers occupied a little more than one-fourth of the farm land; in 1945 a little more than one-fifth, and in 1950 less than one-sixth of the total. The chart on page 24 shows that the area lost to Negro occupancy in these six states since 1920 equals the entire area, farm and non-farm, of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island combined.

During these thirty years the number of white farm operators has remained virtually unchanged, and the land occupied by them has increased by 13 million acres, with almost all of the increase occurring since World War II.

Changes in the numbers of farm operators, farm owners and croppers, and in farm land occupied, are summarized in Table 2. Between the two world wars there were losses in both white and Negro farm ownership. The gains of white farmers during World War II considerably exceeded their losses in previous decades, but not so with the Negro farmers. The number of Negro farm owners in 1945 remained smaller than in 1920 in the six states.

The liberal organ *The Nation* recently printed an article by a Mississippi plantation owner which paints the "new South" as a veritable paradise for the Negro people. Among other miracles, the author claims that "All over the South the old plantations are being cut up into forty- or eighty-acre farms that are owned and operated by Negroes."[7]



WHITE

=

=

NEGRO

Shifts in Farmland Occupancy

Six Southern States 1920-1950

Source: US Census 1950

Actually, between 1945 and 1950, the number of Negro farm owners in the six southern states studied declined 3,000, while the number of white farm owners increased 6,000. As for the breaking up of large plantations into moderate-sized units, this also is the exact opposite of the truth (see Chapter VI).

What about recent changes in the number of croppers?

During World War II, there was a rapid drop in the number of white croppers. Tens of thousands of "poor whites" were able to get jobs in war industries and so escape from the misery of southern farm tenancy. Some became farm owners. The number of white croppers declined 25% in five years.

At the same time the number of Negro croppers decreased but little, and actually increased in the Carolinas and Georgia. Their opportunities for jobs in war industry were fewer since discrimination in industry was not reduced sufficiently. And their opportunities to become landowners were also limited. Thus plantation operators were able to get some additional Negro sharecroppers to replace the whites going into war industry; and in some cases to replace hired farm laborers who could no longer be obtained at the customary low wages.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY STATISTICS, WHITE AND NEGRO FARMERS, SIX SOUTHERN STATES, 1920-1950

(*in thousands*)

	1920	1940	1945	1950
Farm operators				
White	803	832	805	808
Negro	634	473	472	405
Land in farms (*acres*)				
White	78,448	81,115	80,856	91,610
Negro	27,235	20,946	21,183	18,139
Full owners				
White	426	404	469	475
Negro	92	78	89	86
Croppers				
White	104	134	101	85
Negro	243	227	213	158

(SOURCES: *Agriculture*, State Table 3, and *Census of Agriculture*, 1945 and 1940.)

After the war, competition for jobs reappeared in industry and in agriculture. Machines displaced men, and cotton acreage was reduced. Many left the farms on their own initiative, to take industrial jobs. But by and large, the landlord made the decision. The number of Negro croppers was reduced 26%, of white croppers 16%.

Comparison of the number of full owners in 1950 with earlier years is imperfect, because of changes in Census definitions involving full owners, part owners, and cash tenants. To avoid this difficulty, all farmers can be classified into two broad groups, sharecroppers and *independent* farmers. The latter include full owners, part owners, managers, and cash tenants.

Of course the owners and cash tenants are only relatively "independent"—they are very dependent indeed on banks, mortgage holders, equipment companies, processing companies, etc. But in order to contrast them with the completely dependent sharecroppers, it is permissible to use the term "independent farmers."

TABLE 3. INDEPENDENT FARM OPERATORS AND SHARECROPPERS, WHITE AND NEGRO, SIX SOUTHERN STATES, 1940-1950

(*in thousands*)

	White		Negro	
	Independent	*Sharecroppers*	*Independent*	*Sharecroppers*
1940	531	301	149	324
1945	573	231	167	306
1950	601	206	152	253
Percent change				
1940-1945	8	−23	11	−6
1945-1950	5	−12	−9	−17
1940-1950	13	−31	2	−22

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Agriculture,* State Table 3.)

Table 3 shows an even sharper contrast between white and Negro farmers in recent tenure changes, to the disadvantage of the Negro farmers. Between 1945 and 1950 the number of white independent farmers increased 18,000 or 5% while the number of Negro independent farmers decreased 14,000 or 9%.

At first glance these figures could lead to false conclusions. They appear to show that the losses of the Negro farm population have been the gains of the majority of the white farm population. They appear to justify the official propaganda, at least so far as white farmers are concerned. A big drop in white sharecroppers, and a big rise in white independent farmers are shown. Does not this mean that tens of thousands of "poor whites" have moved up the agricultural "ladder?" If this were true, it would be of great social significance.

But this is so much statistical trickery. In reality, it is not believable that with the growth of monopoly, in agriculture as well as in industry, there should be a sudden flowering of independent farming in the South. The trick is simple enough. The additional white farm owners are *not* independent family-type farmers. They are a group which has increased very rapidly —nationally and especially in the South—in a significant new social development. They are the tens of thousands of city workers who have bought or rented plots in the country to raise food with which to supplement inadequate wages. They are not independent farmers, but worker-farmers. This group will be discussed more fully in Chapters V and IX. For the present, it is sufficient to state that the number of relatively independent, relatively well-off farm owners, even among the whites, is pitifully small and is decreasing.

There has been no "land reform" even for the poor whites in the South.

Obstacles to Negro Landownership

Why are the Negro farmers unable to become owners? One obvious reason is that a poor farmer or farm worker, a sharecropper or day laborer, lacks the capital to become a farm owner under modern conditions. But that would not be enough to explain the absence of any significant number of really prosperous Negro farmers, or the gross difference between the proportions of Negro and white farm owners. To this purely economic factor must be added the deliberate policy of the white landowners and capitalists of maintaining the Negro people in a subject, extra-exploited situation. At a recent Tuskegee Land

Tenure Conference, college men active in assisting Negro people in their attempts to obtain farms reported on the difficulties.

Alva Tabor, State Teacher Trainer at the Fort Valley State College, Fort Valley, Georgia. "To many applications for loans to become established on farms do not meet the minimum requirements as to the accumulation of money. Some applicants approved for loans are having difficulty in locating a desirable farm to purchase."[8]

J. R. Thomas, State Itinerant Teacher Trainer, Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia:

> The general comments of those supplying the information that made up my talk were, namely:
>
> 1. There is not enough available farm land for purchase.
> 2. Negroes cannot purchase or rent good farms.
> 3. No desire to change the status of hired hand or sharecropper.
> 4. It's hard to get loans at 4%.
> 5. The farms, usually, are too small.[9]

These experts bring out the fact that economic difficulties are compounded by refusal to sell decent land to Negroes.

The Government advertises widely its programs for helping farm tenants become owners. The main program has been that of the Farmers Home Administration. Between its start in 1938, and the end of 1950, it made a total of 60,000 real estate loans to help farm tenants become owners. That is a national figure—clearly a drop in the bucket. Considered on an annual basis of less than 10,000 loans, it is a small fraction of the number of farmers who change status for various natural and economic reasons each year. Moreover its main activity was during the Roosevelt Administration. Since 1946, new loans have been limited to 1,000-3,000 annually.

In general, the figures on loans to Negro farmers are not separated. But one figure is available. In the state of Georgia during 1950 a grand total of 42 land ownership loans were made to Negro farmers! At that rate "land reform" would be completed for the Negro tenant farmers of Georgia in 904 years—if all of those becoming owners, and their descendants, were able to retain ownership, and no other Negro farm owners lost their farms!

Mr. Howard Bertsch, Director, Farm Ownership Division, Farmers Home Administration, defines "an efficient family-type farm management unit" as one which requires an investment of not less than $15,000 and up to $35,000 or $40,000, evenly divided between real estate and other capital (machinery, livestock, etc.):

> We must keep in mind that by the right kind of families, we mean farm families who have developed the managerial ability to manage a $20,000 business in a highly competitive field. . . . Wherever practicable, preference will be given to those applicants who are able to make an initial down payment or who are owners of livestock and farm implements necessary to carry out successful farm operations. . . . Legally, we may make Farm Ownership loans only to those families which our locally established County committee is willing to certify as having a reasonable chance of success. These committees are made up of three local persons, two of whom must be farmers.[10]

But the Negro tenant farmers (or even farm owners), have no experience managing a $20,000 business. Their enterprise is rarely on more than one-fifth that scale. Hardly any can make the 10% down payment generally required as a minimum, and hardly any have even a small fraction of the scale of equipment and livestock which the Government officials set up as a necessity. Then the locally established county committee, dominated by the wealthy white farmers, is not going to permit this program to operate as a genuine land reform program, any more than the landowners of the Philippines, or Italy, who everywhere resist even the largely spurious "land reform" programs introduced into these countries by U.S. advisers.

How account for the persistence of a certain number of Negro farm owners, only slowly declining, in the face of these obstacles? The Negro people are permitted to purchase small amounts of the worst land, that white persons would not attempt to cultivate. Thus, in South Carolina in 1950, only 26.1% of the Negro farm owners were located on hard surface roads, as compared with 33.3% for Negro croppers, and 42.7% for all white farmers.[11] Marshall Harris, of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture, commented on similar statistics for 1940 as "an indication that many colored farmers who have climbed the ladder to ownership have done so at the expense of locating on poor land in out-of-the-way places."[12]

Similarly, the average value of land and buildings per acre for Negro full owners in South Carolina in 1950 was $52.90, as compared with $85.05 for the Negro cropper. Of course, the Negro cropper does not own this land which is 60% more valuable. The landlord does. It is not worth his while to use the land worth only $52.90 per acre, so the Negro farmer is permitted to buy it. The average value per acre of land of white full owners was $65.07.[13] This is "only" one-fifth more than the average for Negro full owners, but the actual difference is much greater. For the white farmer has much more pasture and woodland, since he is able to carry out diversified agriculture. Undoubtedly his cropland exceeds in value that of the Negro owner by a much wider margin.

Yield statistics confirm the general conclusion—the best land, owned by the white plantation landlords; medium quality, by the white "independent" farmers; and the worst, marginal land, by the Negro farmers.

Even this limited ownership of land, usually the poorest, is the result of bitter struggles of the Negro people. Beaufort Island, near Charleston S.C., is one of the well-known places where the Negro people seized the land after the Civil War, and maintained land by force of arms.[14] Their tenure status today reflects those struggles. Of 1,406 Negro farmers in Beaufort County in 1950, 890 were full owners, 346 part owners, and only 170 tenants, of whom 2 were croppers.[15]

III. MECHANIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION

THERE HAVE BEEN rapid strides in the mechanization of southern agriculture since 1940, and especially since 1945. In Georgia the number of tractors on farms increased from 9,000 in 1940 to 25,000 in 1945 and 60,000 in 1950. By 1950 about one farm in six in the six southern states had one or more tractors.[1] It is true that the South still lagged far behind the rest of the country, and was still less mechanized than the rest of the country's agriculture was in 1940. Nonetheless, the change is notable, and is officially hailed as bringing to an end the traditional southern backwardness.

But the liberal journals and government tracts which boast of this mechanization slur over or ignore the most vital question—who shares in this mechanization, who benefits from it? American and British oil companies use the most modern equipment in such countries as Venezuela and Arabia. However, their entrance on the scene has brought no "modernization" to the lives of the masses of the people, but usually a sharp deterioration in their conditions.

Modern imperialism, as distinguished from nineteenth century colonialism, often uses advanced technical means for the extraction of the highest profits out of the labor of workers and peasants kept at colonial wage and income standards. This is what is happening in the South. The mechanization of agriculture is the means for the intensified exploitation of the Negro and poor white farm population, *without their sharing in the advantages of that mechanization.* Furthermore, it is a means for more rapidly pushing the Negro farmers especially, and the poor whites to a lesser extent, off the land. The Negro owners and the poor white owners and cash tenants—all those who cannot afford the new machinery, have increasing difficulty competing against

the newly mechanized larger farms and plantations. And tens of thousands of sharecroppers are simply tractored off the land.

Negro and White Mechanization

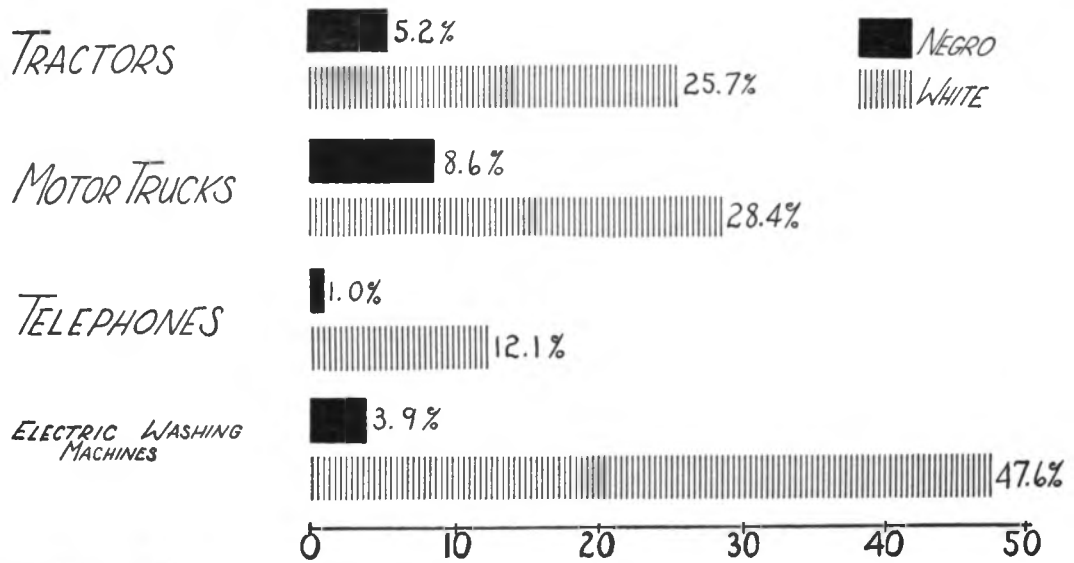
Because southern agriculture is based on a particular pattern of exploitation, mechanization is adapted to that pattern. The forms of exploitation—wage labor plus sharecropper labor: A higher degree of mechanization when wage labor is used; predominantly hand labor combined with very little mechanization when sharecropper labor is used. Machines minimize the cash outlay where wage labor is used, and hence lead to the highest profits. But with the sharecropper system the most can be gotten out of the soil with less investment in machinery and a minimum of cash outlay for the "furnishing" of the sharecropper family.

The chart opposite shows how Negro farmers are left out of mechanization. In the six southern states studied, approximately 208,000 white farmers, or 25.7% of the total, had tractors in 1950. But only 20,985 Negro farmers, or 5.2% of the total, had tractors. The discrepancy was even more marked with the more expensive specialized types of equipment needed for modern dairying, poultry farming, growing of feed for livestock. Thus, in Mississippi, with approximately as many Negro as white farmers, sixteen times as many white farmers as Negro had milking machines, thirteen times as many had electric chick-brooders, forty-two times as many had corn pickers, four times as many had pick-up hay balers, eight times as many had grain combines. Ownership of all of these facilities by Negro farmers was pitifully small. Of some 123,000 farms of Negro operators, 206 reported milking machines, 1,006 electric chick-brooders, 568 grain combines, 588 pick-up hay balers and 15 corn pickers.[1]

Negro owners are poorly mechanized, although they are somewhat better off in this respect than the Negro tenants. Thus in Mississippi, 9.6% of the Negro full owners and 16.8% of the Negro part owners had tractors, as compared with 2.4% of Negro tenants. Among the white farmers, *all tenure* categories had a higher percentage of tractorization than the Negro full owners: the white full owners, 32.4%; part owners, 54.3%; managers,

Percent of Farms with Specified Equipment

Six Southern States
1950



Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture '50

84.7%; cash tenants, 39.6%; crop-share tenants, 23.6%; and croppers, 10.7%.[2*]

As with productive machinery, the Negro farmers have not shared in the mechanical advances which make housework easier. Electric washing machines have become quite common on the farms in recent years. But in the six states in 1950, while 47.6% of the white farmers had electric washing machines, only 3.9% of the Negro farmers had them. Similarly, 12.1% of the white farmers, and only 1.0% of the Negro farmers had telephones. Again, Negro owners were little better off than Negro tenants and croppers, and generally worse off than all tenure categories of white farmers. Thus in Mississippi 21.4% of the white croppers had electric washing machines, but only 4.3% of the Negro full owners.

Despite all the mechanization, the mule remains the main source of work power for the Negro farmer in the South. And many do not even have a mule. In the six states, 145,160 Negro farmers, or 36% of all Negro farmers, were reported as having no tractors, horses, or mules. Among the white farmers, 205,906, or 25.4% were in this same category. However the figure for white farmers, to a greater extent than for Negro, includes a large proportion of city people who live in the country and have small plots, as well as specialty farmers who do not require work power.

Among the Negro farmers, those without horses, tractors, and mules are mainly croppers: 85.8% of the Negro croppers in Mississippi, and 64.2% of the Negro croppers in South Carolina are in this situation.[3]

In the South of the United States, in the middle of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of poor farmers, mainly Negroes, are no better off for equipment than the horseless peasants of tsarist Russia, the lowest landed strata in the backward agriculture of that epoch.

* The figures for all categories are somewhat exaggerated because they are limited to what the Census calls "commercial farms," that is, excluding very small farms. The tractors reported in the hands of croppers are presumably landlords' tractors in use on the croppers' farms at the time of the census. By definition, all of the cropper's work power is supplied by the landlord.

Of course, one may say, there is nothing surprising about this. Since they are croppers, by definition they are not owners of any equipment. The fact that some of them are reported as having mules is just an accident. It does not mean that the cropper owned the mule, but merely that the landlord had it stationed there.

Old stuff—yes. But more shocking than ever! Precisely because there has been a rapid advance in mechanization in the South, the complete bypassing of this class of croppers stands out like a sore thumb.

The 1950 Census does not give statistics on the value of machinery and equipment owned. But it does give data on machinery expenditures, including repairs, fuel, and cost of machine hire. The sum of these expenditures, per acre of cropland harvested, provides a *rough* index of the degree of application of machinery. The results, for South Carolina, are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4. EXPENDITURES FOR MACHINE HIRE, FUEL, AND REPAIRS, PER ACRE OF CROPLAND HARVESTED, BY COLOR AND TENURE, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1949

Tenure	*White*	*Negro*
All Farms	$8.03	$2.41
Commercial:		
Full Owners	8.81	2.63
Part Owners	9.71	2.70
Managers	11.82	..
Cash Tenants	8.00	1.67
Crop-share Tenants	4.91	2.35
Croppers	4.78	2.88
Non-commercial	6.29	1.65

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Agriculture*, State Tables 15 and 16.)

The application of machinery on the farms of whites is several times as intense as on the farms of Negroes. Even on the farms of white croppers, there is twice as much use of machinery as on the farms of Negro farmers, including Negro farm owners. Actually, these figures do not show the full extent of the difference. On the farms of Negroes, machine hire is the main item of machinery expenditure. This includes the wages of

workers operating the hired machines, as well as profits of the machine owners in the form of rent. Expenses for machines owned by the farmers are the main items for white farmers. In this case wages of workers operating the machines are not included, nor are depreciation costs.

Among the white farmers, there are wide variations according to the average degree of wealth and full development of capitalism in different types of tenure. The highest expenditure is by the managers of the giant absentee-owned farms; next, the part owners who have prospered and increased the scale of their operation by renting land; next, the farm owners and cash tenants; then a sharp drop to the crop-share tenants and croppers. Of course, there are wide variations *within* these tenure groups. The average for owners, for example, conceals the expenditures of very intensive capitalist farmers, as well as those of the home farms of the plantations, on the one side, and of the many thousands of small white farm owners who still maintain a weak grip on the land.

Thus there were 1,896 "commercial" farms in Oconee and Pickens Counties in the northwestern corner of South Carolina in 1950. Almost all of the farmers in this mountainous area are white. There were 6 farmers in Commercial Class I (value of products sold exceeding $25,000), all of them part owners. These six farmers spent an average of $18.26 for the three items of machinery expense per acre of cropland harvested. On the other end of the scale there were 1,238 farms in Commercial Class VI, with value of products sold between $250 and $1,199. A little more than half of these were owners. These small farmers spent for the three machinery items $2.44 per acre of cropland harvested.[4] They were just as badly off for machinery as the Negro farmers in the Piedmont and coastal areas.

Among the Negro farmers, there is less variation according to tenure, and a different pattern. The most intensive use of machinery is not on the farms of the Negro owners, but on those of the Negro croppers, although it is small enough even here. The explanation is clear enough. The Negro owners, almost all small holders such as the small white mountain farmers, simply cannot afford either to own or hire machinery. The Negro cropper is even worse off, but his landlord may decide

to use machinery on the cropper units and charge it to the cropper—when his profits can be increased in this way.

In Mississippi, where cotton farming is much more mechanized than in the East, the added mechanization of cropper units is more pronounced. Here the spending on machinery items per acre of cropland harvested for Negro full owners was $2.66, about the same as for Negro full owners in South Carolina. But the spending per acre of cropland harvested by Negro croppers was $5.88, or twice as much as in South Carolina.

To summarize, the mechanization of agriculture leaves out the Negro farm owner. The Negro cropper in some places sees little of this machinery, in others it appears on the scene, not to ease his labor, but to ease him off the land and increase the rate of exploitation.

Ernest E. Neal tells of: "the Price McLemore Plantation in Montgomery County, Alabama . . . a completely mechanized cotton plantation. Tractors do the plowing, flame throwers burn the grass, and mechanized pickers are used for picking. Five Negro wage workers perform the labor required on this 2,000 acre plantation. . . . The tenants who formerly worked this plantation before it was mechanized have moved away; their shacks have been torn down, and 'the evils of the plantation system went with them.'"

Mr. Neal says that the five wage earners are treated like human beings, their children go to school nine months per year, the plantation owner *plans* (!) to build them "modern concrete block cottages with running water and electricity"—all because he must retain the skills of these five workers. But how many of the 20 to 40 displaced tenant families are now migratory farm laborers, how many are existing in city slums, with part-time employment in service trades or the fringes of industry?

Lewis W. Jones, Director of Research, Rural Life Council, Tuskegee Institute, reports:

> In studying the plantation, we found certain changes in process. On one of the plantations studied there was a change from mules to tractors, and the plantation owner charged those men who could not operate tractors themselves the wage he paid the tractor operator per hour to plow their crops. . . .

> On one plantation when they changed from mules to tractors, the owner sold his mules at one cent a pound. On another plantation the owner sold his mules to tenants at $450 per pair, and transferred his loss to the tenants, who, if they wanted to stay on the place, had to buy these mules and become renters instead of sharecroppers the next year.[6]

In many cases the introduction of tractors is used to increase the expenses loaded onto the cropper; in other cases to reduce his share of the crop (see Chapter VIII).

Thus mechanization of the better off white farmers has increased the competitive disadvantage of virtually all the Negro farmers, as well as the poor white farmers who cannot afford machinery.

When agriculture was not mechanized, the essential requirement to advance from the status of a cropper to a share tenant or cash tenant was the price of a mule. Now the essential requirement is the price of a tractor, which is five or ten times as high. The immediate effect of mechanization, then, is to freeze class lines in southern agriculture more firmly than ever. But there are other likely effects, which so far have not yet come to the surface on a large scale. The decade of rapid mechanization has also been one of relatively high prices for farm products, of relative farm prosperity.

In the next real depression the situation will change rapidly. Some large-scale mechanized cotton farms will be able to produce and even profit with very low prices. The pressure on the weaker farms will be magnified, even in comparison with the depression of the nineteen thirties. The threat to the tenure of the smaller farm owners, and to the jobs of the croppers and farm laborers, will become most acute exactly when the opportunities for city jobs will disappear. Mechanization, combined with the taking over of previously idle land by ranchers, will make it more difficult for dispossessed farmers and unemployed city workers to subsist on small plots of land—as many did during the 1930's.

Of course, none of these things are inevitable. They are only inevitable if nothing is done to forestall them. And the only people who can forestall them are the likely victims, who have the incentive to organize for needed actions in their interest.

Diversification

Southern agriculture has traditionally been one-crop agriculture. Depending on the area, the staple crop has been tobacco, cotton or peanuts, with rice and sugar cane as specialties in parts of Louisiana. Production of varied food crops, especially livestock products, has been but little developed, corresponding to the low living standards and small market for foods provided by the masses of the southern people. In this respect, southern agriculture has resembled that in semi-colonial countries like Cuba and Brazil.

During the past decade there has been a noticeable diversification of southern agriculture. Much of the former cotton land abandoned over the past two decades has been brought back into use, especially since World War II, as pasture land and feed crop land to support livestock, dairy and poultry farming.

What has this meant to the Negro farmers in the South?

Marshall Harris, of the United States Department of Agriculture, gives the illusion that they are participating broadly in this diversification:

> . . . as Sherman Briscoe has said, "balanced farming—the new pattern which is replacing one-crop agriculture in the South—is beginning to pay off for colored farmers in terms of better living." Dairy cows, beef cattle, and hogs are occupying many acres that were formerly devoted to cotton. To support the growing livestock industry, corn yields are being increased, improved pastures are being expanded, year-round pasturing is growing by leaps and bounds, and hay production is finding a place in the diversified cropping system. . . . Home gardens are furnishing more and better food for the Negro farmer's table. The old one-crop system of farming is being licked in many areas.[7]

Most of Harris' report was well-prepared, pointing up very real problems. But here he accepted uncritically rosy statements that have no foundation in fact.

A simple indicator of diversification is the proportion of farm sales in the form of livestock and livestock products. In the country as a whole most farm products sold are animal products, but in the old South only about one-quarter of the total are in this category. However, the South has gained in livestock pro-

duction. In 1940, among white farmers in the six states studied, 20.1% of all sales consisted of livestock and livestock products. By 1950, this percentage had risen to 30.0. Among Negro farmers, in 1940 the proportion of livestock and livestock products was 3.3%; by 1950 it had risen to 5.7%.[8]

So diversification among Negro farmers did increase, but remained trivial, and the gap in diversification between Negro and white farmers increased, rather than decreased.

To indicate the comparative situation in diversification, Table 5 shows figures for North Carolina, where because of continued good tobacco prices, there has been least general progress in diversification; and in Georgia, where there has been the most general progress in diversification.

TABLE 5. PERCENT "DIVERSIFIED" PRODUCTS OF TOTAL SOLD, NORTH CAROLINA AND GEORGIA, 1949

	North Carolina		Georgia	
Tenure	*White*	*Negro*	*White*	*Negro*
All Farms	27.3	4.4	49.3	12.0
Full Owners	38.5	13.6	60.0	28.9
Part Owners	33.5	8.7	46.8	22.6
Managers	72.8	13.8	68.0	16.8
Cash Tenants	26.6	5.3	39.3	12.7
Share-crop Tenants	6.6	3.0	23.9	9.3
Croppers	5.2	2.0	20.5	6.3

(Source: Compiled from *Agriculture*, State Table 16. For this calculation, "diversified" products are regarded as all those sold, except the category "field crops, other than vegetables and fruits and nuts." In Georgia the field crops are almost all cotton, tobacco and peanuts; in North Carolina, tobacco and cotton.)

Diversification of one-third or more is limited to white owners and absentee-owned farms (manager-operated) in North Carolina, to these groups and to white cash tenants in Georgia. In each tenure group, the Negro farmers are considerably less diversified than the white. Negro owners are little better off than white sharecroppers. In North Carolina 98% of the sales of Negro croppers consisted of cotton or tobacco, plus a little surplus corn. In Mississippi, where cotton is the staple throughout the state, cotton accounted for 55.5% of all farm products sold by white farmers, but 89.5% of all farm products sold by

Negro farmers, and 96.3% of all farm products sold by Negro croppers.

Georgia now claims to lead the nation in broiler production. But in 1949, while white farmers in Georgia sold $44 million of poultry and poultry products, Negro farmers sold only half a million dollars worth (there are three times as many white as Negro farmers in Georgia). Livestock and dairy farming has also grown rapidly, and huge acreages have been converted to year-round grazing. But white farmers sold 84 times as much dairy products, and 14 times as much livestock products, as Negro farmers. In Georgia, 18,000 white croppers sold more dairy products and four times as much poultry products as all the 50,000 Negro farmers in that state. Georgia is famous for its peaches, watermelons, and other fruits. The white farmers sold $5.7 million of fruits and nuts, the Negro farmers $0.2 million. Georgia produces most of the country's naval stores on its turpentine farms. But white farmers sold 16 times as much forest products as Negro farmers.[9]

The basic reason why the Negro farmers cannot share appreciably in the diversification of agriculture in the South is clear enough. The requirement for commercial livestock and dairy farming—extensive acreages of grazing land—is not available to the Negro farmer because he cannot get the land. The reqiurement for commercial poultry and fruit farming—a large investment in specialized equipment and raw materials—is unobtainable because he lacks the capital and cannot get the credit. In addition to these barriers, the white ruling classes in the South put special obstacles in the way of diversification of Negro farming. R. J. Courtney, State Leader, Extension Work, Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, reports: "In one area Negro farmers are not able to sell milk on the public market because of race, or because they cannot get approval for operating a dairy and selling the milk to the public."[10]

Nor has diversification been a benefit to the majority of the white farmers. Actually, diversification has meant the establishment of large capitalist specialty farms in new products, at the expense of the limited diversified production of smaller farmers.

Perhaps the Georgia broiler industry is the best example of that. Between 1940 and 1950 the number of chickens sold by

Georgia farms increased tenfold. But the number of farms selling any chickens was cut in half. Actually, 7,382 specialized poultry farms (3.5% of all farms in Georgia), accounted for 87% of all the value of poultry products sold by Georgia farmers in 1949. Only 55 of the poultry farmers were Negroes. And the poultry farmers are no more diversified than the cotton farmers —since more than 90% of what they sell consists of poultry products.[11] Among the smaller poultry farmers, as among the smaller cotton farmers, a break in the one-product market can mean disaster.

Diversification of the total farm product has meant more *specialization*—that is, less *diversification*—for the individual farmer. It has meant a reduction in the number and proportion of farmers able to sell foodstuffs on the market in addition to staple crops; and a reduction in the number of farmers able to provide a good part of their own food.

In Georgia, the proportion of farmers owning cattle fell from 77% in 1940 to 67% in 1950. Before the war, 17% sold dairy products, in 1950 only 11%. Owners of chickens fell from 91% to 83%, and sellers of poultry products from 44% to 34%. The proportion raising vegetables for home use fell from 89% to 79%, those selling vegetables from 13% to 12%. The proportion raising Irish potatoes fell from 31% to 25%, sweet potatoes from 62% to 34%.[12]

Similar changes are shown in the other states. But the tendency to increased specialization is sharper in Georgia, where diversification has made the most progress.

There is one exception to the general trend. The number of farms selling cattle and hogs in each of the states increased sharply, virtually doubling in some cases.

In the case of pigs, this was at least partly due to temporary market factors, and at the expense of farm home consumption of the animals.

The establishment of specialized poultry farms, and marketing channels based on these; and the establishment of large corporate canneries, and the linking of special farms to these canneries, create conditions in which the smaller "family size" farmer cannot compete in the market, and often cannot even get into the market, with his small "diversified" food production.

As a matter of fact, specialized farming in new products in the South has developed mainly where the majority of the farm population is being pushed off the land. Georgia poultry production is most developed in the north, in the hill country, the traditional stronghold of the small independent farmer. In one group of 10 counties in the northeastern corner of the state there are 1,327 poultry farmers, approximately one-eighth of the 10,411 farmers in the area. These poultry farmers account for 64% of the total value of farm products sold in the area. Alongside of the poultry farmers there are 7,567 non-commercial farmers—73% of the total. This great majority of all farmers no longer can make a living out of agriculture. They depend on jobs in industry. They are on the way out.

Nor do the poultry farmers enjoy a secure position. Out of the $5,714,000 of sales, they had to spend $4,756,000 for feed and poultry alone, leaving a margin of $958,000, or $722 per farmer, to meet other operating expenses and living costs.[13]

Caught between the monopoly price of the feed companies, and the fluctuating price for broilers, the majority of the poultry farmers are in continual danger of extinction from the next break in the market.

Specialization has another harmful effect. The Negro farmer, along with the white, and more acutely, is less able to supply his own food. If he is a plantation cropper or tenant, the owner, introducing tractors, is less willing to permit space for a vegetable garden. If he is an "independent" farmer, the same pressures forcing specialization in general apply to him, making it impossible for him to devote as much of his acreage and labor as formerly to raising food for his family.

Between 1947 and 1951 there was an increase of about one-tenth in the physical volume of farm products sold in Georgia and North Carolina. But in this same four-year interval, there was a reduction of about one-third in the physical volume of food production for farm home consumption.[14] The southern states are not unique in this respect. But it is a much more serious matter in the southern states, because the poor southern farmers have been more dependent on home farm production for their food than have farmers in other parts of the country.

Another point of importance: The diversification of southern

farm production has been mainly diversification for the national market. It has not led to a great improvement in the poor local food supply of the southern people. Thus, in Georgia, with the tenfold increase in sales of broilers for the national market, the sale of chicken eggs per capita of the non-farm population fell from 114 in 1929 to 84 in 1949.[15] In contrast, national per capita consumption of eggs was 376 in 1949, somewhat more than in 1929.[16]

An Agriculture Department bulletin shows per capita production of milk in the South at 484 pounds in 1929 and 1940, rising to 539 pounds in 1945, but falling back to 484 pounds in 1950. This was 55% of the per capita production in the rest of the country, and about the same percentage as twenty years earlier.[17]

To summarize: Diversification has occurred in the total farm production of the South, but not in the individual farmer's product, which has become even more specialized. The Negro farmer has shared but trivially in the kind of diversification which has taken place. This is especially true of the plantation croppers and tenants. Southern farmers are decreasingly able to supply their own food. Negro farmers, especially croppers and tenants, are most dependent on purchased food.

IV. LIVING STANDARDS

HAS THERE BEEN any relief from the bitter, bare subsistence poverty which has traditionally beset the overwhelming majority of the southern rural population, especially the Negro people?

The Congressional committee report, *Making Ends Meet on Less than* $2,000 *per Year*, describes the dire conditions of the 10,000,000 American families in that situation. Broken homes, broken lives, broken jobs, broken health—that is how it characterizes their life. Not enough food, abominable housing, no medical service, premature death—that is how the report describes the situation of almost one-third of the American people. But this one-third represents an averaging of various situations. In the northeast, for example, "only" 21% of all families are under the $2,000 per year line. Almost half of all the families with an income less than $2,000 live in the South. In 1949, 38% of southern white families, and 76% of southern Negro families had incomes of under $2,000.[1]

The extreme southern poverty becomes the rule in the countryside. Among rural-farm southern white families, 65% were under the $2,000 per year mark; among the southern Negro families, 91% were under the $2,000 per year mark in 1949.

In the six states studied the *typical* income* of a southern white farm family was $1,200, or 40% below the poverty line; and of a Negro farm family around $500, or 75% below the poverty line! True, these medians include single individuals as well as families, and single individuals do not need so much. However, if they were omitted, and the comparisons restricted to families, the figures would run only $50 to $100 higher than those cited.

* The Census shows median incomes. If the median income is $1,200, then half of the people get less than this amount, half get more. The medians were below $1,200 for whites and below $500 for Negroes in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, above this level in the other three states studied.

In South Carolina, in 1949, only 0.2% of the Negro farm families were well-off, with incomes of $5,000 or better. Among white farm families 5.9% were in this income range.[2] A few thousand white farm families and a mere handful of Negro farm families in each southern state live well; and these few thousand wealthy white families dominate the countryside, determine the poverty of the millions.

Nutrition

Food supply is the most basic item in living standards. The Brazilian scientist, Josué de Castro, in his important book, *The Geography of Hunger,* writes in reference to the South: "No doubt it will come as something of a shock, particularly to American readers, to find part of the United States included among the great hunger areas of the world. . . . But the existence of hunger right in the world's supply house is an undeniable fact. It is not a matter of a small plot, but of a geographical region large enough to include whole countries. This hunger area in the United States is a region with about 500,000 square miles of surface and a population of some 30,000,000 people."[3]

Figures of the Department of Agriculture show that the great majority of farm families in the South get grossly inadequate diets. Hunger afflicts sharecroppers and farm laborers the most, owners the least. The Negro farm people are the main victims, with even Negro farm owners getting considerably less food than white sharecroppers and laborers. In 1947 the average person in the United States consumed $394 worth of food. This included the hungry as well as the well-fed and the overfed. Leaving out alcoholic beverages the per capita food expenditure averaged $333.[4]

Per capita food consumption among farm families in the Mississippi Delta cotton area was as follows in 1947: white full owners, $345; renters, $272; sharecroppers and laborers, $212; Negro full owners, $179; renters, $169; sharecroppers and laborers, $136. Of these, only the white full owners got approximately the national average. And the figure for this group covers both the rich plantation owners, who undoubtedly received plenty of food, and the small white owners, who received considerably less.

The white sharecroppers and farm laborers got two-thirds of the national average. Negro farm owners received barely half of the national average food supply, Negro sharecroppers and farm laborers two-fifths of the national average.

The farm families in the Piedmont tobacco area were a little better off. White owners averaged $309 per capita of food, white renters $251, white sharecroppers and laborers $253. Families of Negro farm owners received $229 per capita, Negro renters $181, sharecroppers and laborers $172 per capita.[6]

The most conservative estimate of food requirements is that provided by the worker's family budget of the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, which assumes various economies, success in purchasing cheap foods in season, etc. This budget shows 1947 food requirements in southern cities averaging about $262 per capita.[7] Even on this basis, white sharecroppers and laborers, and all groups of Negro cotton and tobacco farmers, received less than the specified food requirements, and the Negro cotton sharecroppers and laborers only half of the requirements.

The Congressional report, *Making Ends Meet on Less than $2,000 a Year,* describes the food situation of southern farm families (without specifying whether they are Negro or white). The Canton family of Arkansas, sharecroppers, reported: "Food is so high that there is very little meat we are able to buy; sometimes we have it twice a month. We buy white flour, white potatoes, dried peas and beans, molasses, a little sugar, salt, pepper, and baking powder. When the hens are laying, we have eggs, and sometimes I kill a hen for food. The ground has been so cold and wet this spring, our vegetables are not large enough to eat."[8]

The Thorpe family, Missouri farm laborers, reported: "When times get bad, and home canned food runs out, the basic diet of the family runs to fried bread, cornbread and flour gravy. . . . Beans, with a bit of fat meat, are added when things loosen up a little. In 'good times,' when there is money or credit, the family spends about $10 a week for food."[9]

De Castro describes southern hunger as "another typical example of hunger as a man-made plague, since the region is eminently suited by nature to the production of adequate food supplies."[10]

De Castro attributes southern hunger to the sharecropping system, "a kind of semislavery," which forces the laborers to do a certain kind of work for a percentage of the product "calculated so that it ordinarily fails to provide enough to eat."[11] However, de Castro does not recognize the impact of the special oppression of the Negro people, both in permitting sharecropping, and in causing such serious malnutrition. The figures given above, showing the gap between the diets of all classes of Negro farm people and the poorest of the white farmers, bring out the importance of this.

De Castro correctly points out that the landlords profit through the sharecroppers' hunger: "There have never been enough milk and meat in the South because the great landowners always discouraged cattle raising. Pastures would divert land from the cotton fields, and tenants would give the cattle hay that was needed for the mules and horses used in growing cotton and sugar cane. In the same way, the big planters never encouraged the planting of gardens and orchards. They would take up space, and would absorb labor that could not be spared, even for a moment, from the fields devoted to cash crops."[12]

TABLE 6. LAND USE ON CROPPER FARMS, MISSISSIPPI, 1950
(*acres per farm*)

	Entire State		Upper Delta
	white croppers	*Negro croppers*	*all croppers*
Cropland harvested	23.9	16.5	15.2
cotton	13.8	12.2	12.9
corn	7.9	3.9	1.9
soybeans	0.5	0.08	0.16
hay	0.9	0.18	0.09
all other inc. gardens	0.9	0.14	0.08
% of cropper farms with:			
any hay cut	10	3	1
any land pastured	23	5	1
any woodland	15	3	1

(Source: *Agriculture*, State Tables 15, 16, Economic Area Tables 10 and 6, part 1, for Economic Area 1.)

Landlords organize their farms so that the croppers are unable to raise sufficient food for their own use, and must remain dependent on the landlord for much of their food, at exorbitant prices. Table 6 shows how Mississippi croppers' land was used in 1950.

Almost all of the cropland was reserved for cotton, or for corn for the workstock. The land left for gardens or for hay for food animals was trivial. The situation was much worse for the Negro than for the white cropper. He was left one-sixth as much garden area as the white. In the Upper Delta area of Mississippi, the richest cotton area except for the Far West, the concentration of the cropper's labor on production of the cash crop for the landlord was most marked. The Delta cropper, *on the average,* was left a plot about the size of a city house lot to supply his family's food needs! This is shown graphically in the accompanying chart. Of course, many of the croppers in the Delta had no gardens at all.

Table 6 also shows a lack of land on which to pasture animals and obtain wood and other forest products. Again, this lack was more severe, almost total, for the Negro croppers, and worst in the Upper Delta area than elsewhere.

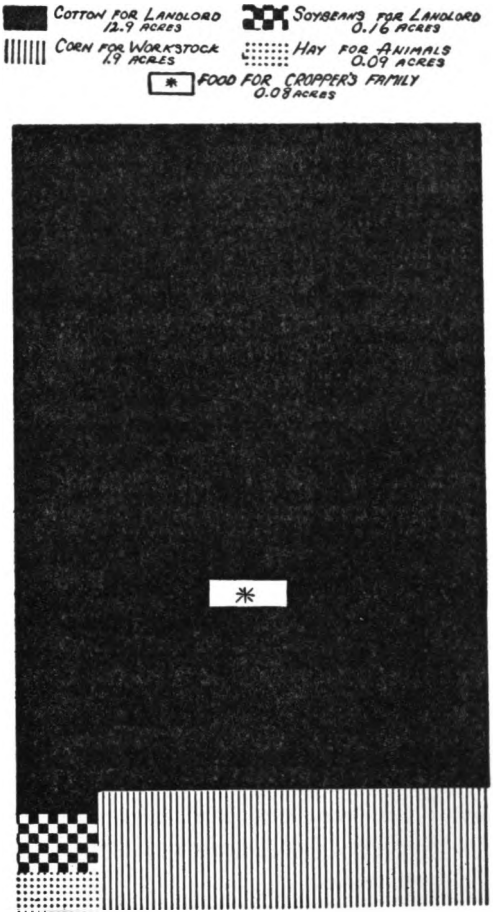
The supply of animals for meat, milk and eggs was similarly scanty.

Averaging out the situation of those with and without animals, the average Negro cropper family in Mississippi could enjoy the milk of 0.45 cows (or one milk cow for more than two families), the meat and lard of 1.9 pigs, and the eggs from the layers among 10.5 chickens.[13] The white croppers were a little better off.

The situation was similar in South Carolina, except that in comparison with Mississippi, larger percentages of Negro croppers had land for pasture or woodland, and more of their cropland was available for gardens. The situation for food animals was much the same in both states.

From all the above statistics, it may be observed that the cropper is given least chance to provide food for his family where cotton agriculture is most advanced, most mechanized, as in the Mississippi Delta. Technical progress in this case simply aggravates the hunger of the oppressed Negro farm population.

USE OF CROPPER'S CROPLAND
UPPER DELTA AREA, MISSISSIPPI, 1950



TOTAL CROPLAND 15.2 ACRES

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture '50

Even the miserable cropper garden produce and livestock are not safe from appropriation by the landlord. A recent Florida study showed that the average cropper unit produced $271 of farm products for home use, of which the landlord took 17%. The average crop-share tenant unit produced $429, of which the landlord took 12%.[14]

Housing

Similar details could be supplied concerning housing, health, clothing and other elements of the standard of living.

The 1950 Housing Census shows that fully 95% of all "non-white" (principally southern Negro, but including Indian, Japanese, etc.) rural homes were substandard in major ways: 52.3% were "dilapidated"—that is, unfit for human occupancy. Only 3.7% had an inside flush toilet. The bulk, 86.2% had a privy, or other outside facilities, but 12.1% had no toilet facilities whatsoever. Only 5.2% had a bathtub or shower; 90.9% had no piped water supply, inside or outside, and only 2.6% had hot and cold running water inside their homes. Extreme overcrowding, with more than one and one-half persons per room, was reported for 30.1% of all "non-white" rural homes. Over one-tenth of the Negro rural dwellings, usually small shacks, were occupied by 10 or more people.[15]

Thus there has been no improvement whatsoever in the run-down shacks in which the Negro farm families are housed.

Eugenia P. Van Landingham, Home Demonstration Agent in Edgecombe County, North Carolina, reported on 138 sharecropper families, mainly Negro, in 1946:

> The average family of 6.5 persons had 3.8 beds. Two families had no chairs at all. . . . Most of the families cooked and ate in the same room, and entertained in their bedrooms.
>
> The major repairs needed for most of the homes were new roofs, ceilings, windows, window panes, leveling, door steps, new floors, weather boarding, additional rooms, and paint. Toilet facilities were very poor and on most farms entirely lacking.
>
> The water supplies of nearly one half of the families were open wells, which were outstanding accident hazards, with decayed curbings. Surface water could pour in and contaminate the water. Only four farms had not been wired for electricity. There were few screens and plenty of flies, mos-

quitoes and bedbugs. The conditions for promoting good health were lacking.[16]

This is in North Carolina, where sharecropper conditions are better than in the other southern states, after several years of good crops and good prices as a result of World War II.

Here we have the typical picture of the application of modern technique to the southern countryside—electric lights in the midst of a pile of unhealthy wreckage.

The same applies to that other symbol of American living standards—the automobile. In South Carolina, in 1950, one out of every three Negro croppers owned an automobile. But 80% of these Negro croppers' automobiles were more than 10 years old[17]—jalopies of pre-war vintage. De Castro writes of them: "These paradoxical car owners without a nickel to buy bread for their starving children are a perfect symbol of misery in the midst of plenty, a characteristic condition of the Old South."[18]

V. CLASS STRUCTURE IN SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE

SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE is dominated by a tiny minority of large-scale commercial enterprises, comprising 1% of the farm population. Less than one-tenth of the farm population can be made to fit into the propaganda picture of the "independent, family-sized farmer." Nine-tenths of the farm population are the rural poor—the tiny proprietors, the sharecroppers, the landless farm wage laborers, the part-time farmers who make their living mainly as workers in the towns. Except for these part-time farmers, the nine-tenths would be called peasants—and, by and large, poor peasants, in most countries. They are the ones who toil with inadequate land and inadequate farm equipment to keep their families going at hunger standards of living.

To this class picture must be added the oppression of the Negro people. Negroes are virtually excluded from the large-scale commercial enterprises. They are a small minority in the middle group. They are the majority among the rural poor.

Commercial Groupings of Farms

A number of things are important in determining the economic importance of a farm: How much capital is invested, how many workers are hired, how much is produced for the market. The 1950 Census groups farms according to only one of these indicators, the value of products sold or produced for market. While not a perfect measure, it gives a rough idea of the importance of a farm. The main weakness of these statistics for the South is the treatment of plantations. The home farm and the sharecropper units are treated as several individual farms. Thus what may be in reality a single very large plantation appears in

the statistics as one moderately large farm and a number of small farms. The analysis in this chapter takes account of this weakness.*

The Census value groupings include 6 commercial classes, and non-commercial farms. In the old South the first two classes (value of farm products sold $25,000 and over; and value of farm products sold $10,000-24,999), constitute the big or rich farms.** They are the highly mechanized farms, on which almost all the work is done by hired labor, and where almost all of the production is for market. Commercial classes III and IV (value of products sold $5,000-$9,999 and $2,500-$4,999) are the middle farms. Here there is less mechanization, the farm operator and his family play an important part in production, together with wage labor; and a sizable part of the total production is often used for farm home consumption.

The proportions of hired labor to family labor show the difference between the rich and middle farmers. In South Carolina, at the time of the Census, on Class I farms there were 13 hired workers to every family worker; and on Class II farms 4 hired workers to every family worker. But on Class III farms, the upper middle farms, the number of family workers somewhat exceeded the number of hired workers, and on the Class IV farms, there were 4 family workers for every hired worker.[1] At the peak season the proportions of hired workers would be higher in all of these classes; but this would not change the sharply marked difference between the Class I and Class II farms on the one hand, and the middle farms on the other.

Commercial classes V and VI and the non-commercial farms are all small or poor farms. The value of produce for sale of class V farms is $1,200-$2,499; of class VI farms, $250-$1,199; and the farm is the main source of income and the main place

* Another weakness is that the value of products sold isn't necessarily an exact indicator of economic importance. Thus, a poultry farm selling $10,000 of products doesn't use as much labor or make as much profits as a cotton farm selling $10,000 of products.

** The Census gives a special tabulation of very large farms in each state, including those with very large areas, very large sales, or very large livestock herds. While not so complete as the analysis followed here, this Census tabulation confirms the dominant economic position of the rich farms.

where the operator works. Non-commercial farms include the part-time farms, where the value of products sold is $250-$1,199, but the operator makes more money off the farm, or works off the farm more than 100 days per year; and the subsistence farms, where the value of product sold is less than $250.*

All the farms in five of the six states studied were grouped as rich, middle, or poor, according to the classes described. North Carolina was left out of this calculation, because the class structure in that state is sufficiently different from the other five states to distort the picture prevailing in most of the area if it were included.

Of the 923,901 farm operators in the five states, 16,544, or 1.8%, were rich farmers. They owned 16.9% of the farm land, and 18.8% of the farm tractors. They accounted for 27.0% of all farm products sold, and 37.1% of livestock products sold, showing that the richer farms are the most diversified. The extent to which machinery and equipment is concentrated in their hands is indicated by the fact that they spent 43.1% of the total spending of all farmers for machinery repairs. Most striking of all, the rich farmers accounted for 50.3% of all wages for hired labor.[2] This shows how fully capitalist agriculture, run as a business enterprise, is concentrated in this comparatively small number of large farms.

The rich farmers also have a decisive weight on the farm market. Their share in production exceeds the 27% of the total sales from their home farms, because they also control the production and sale of most sharecropper units on land they rent. Published data do not permit exact calculations, but with the aid of the special Census report on multiple-unit farms, it is possible to make a rough estimate of the additional production for sale of sharecropper farms controlled by large operators. This amounts to about half of the sales of the large farms themselves.**

* There are also a few "abnormal" farms, such as prison farms, experimental farms, etc.

** On the average. Many large operators get more from sharecropper units than from the home farms. Others have no sharecropper units.

Thus the 1.8% of rich farmers control about 40% of all farm products sold.

Add in the sales of the upper middle farmers (class III), who are closest to the rich farmers economically, and generally follow their lead in political and social questions—again including their sharecropper units—and it turns out that fewer than 5% of all farms, the rich and upper middle farms, control more than three-fifths of all farm products sold.

Next to the rich farmers are the 110,536 middle farmers—classes III and IV. They comprise 12.0% of all farmers, occupy 22.5% of the farm land, account for 25.6% of expenditures for farm labor, and for 31.7% of farm products sold. The remaining 796,-821 farmers, 86.2% of the total, are the poor farmers.[3]

The great gulf between the three groups of farms is shown by the chart on the opposite page.

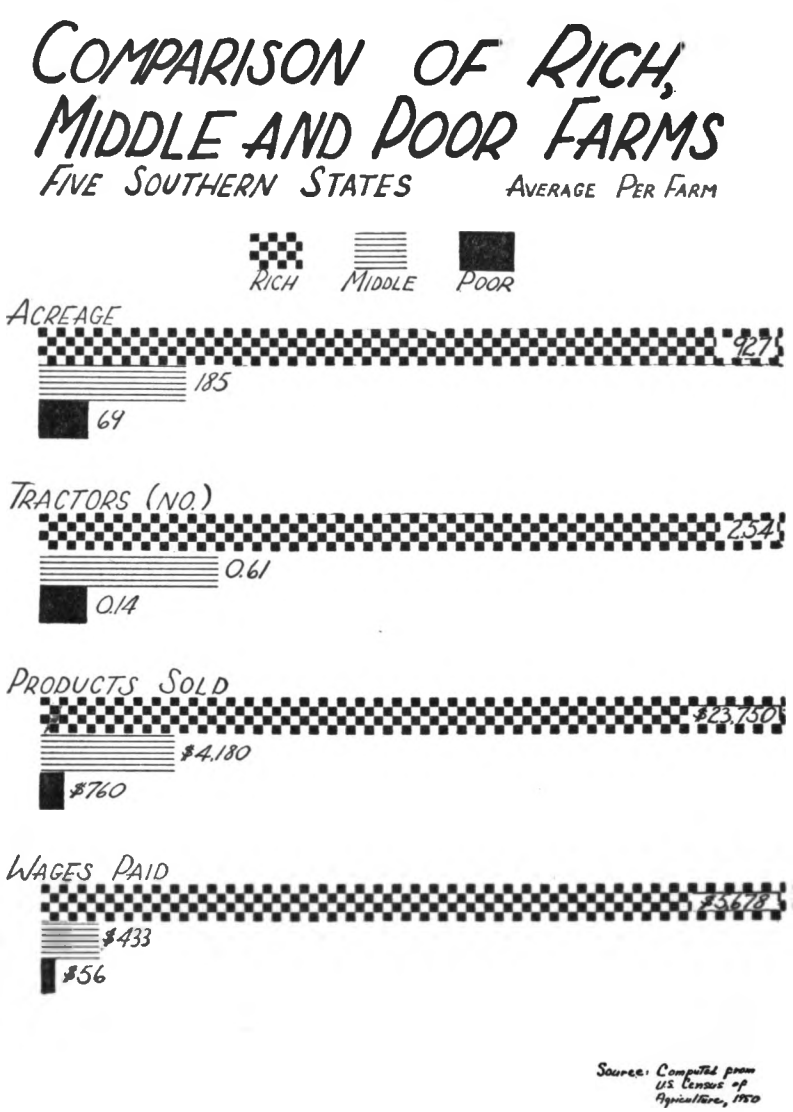
Of particular interest is the ratio of wages to value of product, since it indicates the degree of dependence on hired labor. On the rich farms expenditures for hired labor were 24% of sales, as compared with 10% on middle farms and 7% on poor farms. A similar gap is shown in diversification. On the rich farms, 37% of the total value of products sold were livestock products, as compared with 27% on the middle farms, and 20% on the poor farms.[4] The averages for the poor farms are artificially raised by the inclusion of farms of city workers, and especially of "gentleman farmers," as well as those plantation owners who raise little for sale on the home farm, but carry the machinery and much of the farm expenditure to its account.

To this rough picture of the *class* groupings in southern agriculture must be added the *national* groupings. The virtual exclusion of Negro farmers from the more prosperous classes is illustrated by the following figures for South Carolina. There were 520 very large white farmers in Commercial Class I, but not a single Negro farmer was in this group. There were 1,452 white farmers in Class II, only 48 Negro farmers. In Class III, the upper middle group, there were four and one-half times as many white as Negro farmers, and in Class IV there were one and one-half times as many white as Negro farmers. But in the two lowest commercial classes, especially in the smallest, there were more Negro than white farmers.

Comparison of Rich, Middle and Poor Farms

Five Southern States

Average Per Farm



Source: Computed from U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1950

However, this does not tell the full story. The substantial number of Negro middle farmers, and even the handful of rich Negro farmers in Class II, are not really what they appear to be. Most of them are sharecroppers who turned in good crops for their landlords in 1949.

Thus, in South Carolina, of the 6,597 Negro farmers in Class IV, 5,470 were sharecroppers, and only 1,127 were independent farmers. Among the white farmers in class IV, 3,772 were sharecroppers, and 6,268 were independent farmers. A cropper who makes a crop worth $5,000 is *not* in a higher category than one who makes a crop of $2,000. He may or may not be permitted to live better, to draw more furnish money; he may be permitted a little cash as a reward for his efforts, or just as likely the landlord will simply run up the expense and furnish charges to offset the higher crop credit. It is most unlikely that even a good crop will permit any real advance in his status.

To show the class structure accurately, it is necessary to place the sharecroppers in a separate group, regardless of the value of their output. This is done in Table 7.

TABLE 7. CLASS STRUCTURE OF WHITE AND NEGRO FARMERS, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1950

Class	*White*	*Negro*
Independent farmers		
rich (Classes I & II)	1,879	18
middle (Classes III & IV)	8,817	1,256
poor (V, VI, & non-commercial)	47,973	24,553
Total independent	58,659	25,827
Sharecroppers	19,363	35,515
Grand Total	78,022	61,342

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Agriculture*, State Table 16.)

Table 7 shows: one Negro rich farmer for every 100 white rich farmers; one Negro middle farmer for every 7 white middle farmers; but almost twice as many Negro sharecroppers as white sharecroppers.

Taking the rich and middle farmers together, only 2% of all Negro farmers even approach the official ideal of a self-sustaining, reasonably well-off, family-sized farmer. As for the rest,

a large number are poor farmers, most of them very poor farmers; and the largest number, comprising 58% of all Negro farmers, are in the position of share tenants or croppers, subject to this specially onerous form of exploitation which arose from feudalism in Asia and slavery in the United States.

The Tuskegee Institute gave its 1953 Negro farm family award to Hillard P. Jenkins, operator of a 1,052-acre farm near Loxley, Alabama, who grossed $130,000 in 1952, mainly from potatoes (Loxley is near the major city of Mobile). Principal speaker at the conference at which the award was given was John J. Haggerty, director of the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, Department of Agriculture. According to the *New York Times*, "He emphasized that in the present world crisis the trained Negro scientist and agriculturalist can make a major contribution to this country's role in international affairs, by putting his skills at the disposal of underprivileged peoples in foreign lands where historically there is a distrust of the white race."[5]

Haggerty's purpose: To advertise all over the world Mr. Jenkins' undoubted achievements as typical of what Negro farmers are permitted to accomplish in the United States. The fact: Mr. Jenkins is presumably one of the two Negro farmers in the entire state of Alabama who sold over $25,000 of farm products in 1949, while 687 white farmers were in this category. In Baldwin County, where Mr. Jenkins' farm is located, there were 34 farms with over 1,000 acres each. Their total acreage was 93,364, or almost 3,000 acres for each of these large farms. The total acreage of all the 362 Negro farm operators in Baldwin County was 8,740 acres. Negro people, who constituted 22.5% of the population of Baldwin County, operated less than 3% of the farm land. Moreover, the number of Negro farmers was reduced from 513 in 1945 to 362 in 1950.[6]

Mr. Jenkins' $16,000 modern farm home and $40,000 of modern farm equipment are doubtless real enough. But they represent neither the typical Negro farmer, nor the rudimentary class of rich Negro farmers. Mr. Haggerty has found a "Potemkin's Village" for Voice of America broadcasts.

Worker-Farmer and Farm Laborer

To complete the description of the class structure of southern agriculture, two more steps are necessary. The poor farmers are divided between small commercial farmers and noncommercial farmers. The latter are a mixed group, including some very well-to-do "gentlemen farmers." But in the great majority they are *worker-farmers.* Especially among the white noncommercial farmers, they provide a substantial portion of the working force of the expanding southern factories. By no means are these the worst off. They generally have more household goods than the poor commercial farmer or sharecropper. Their tie to the land has become tenuous. They are passing, or have passed from the status of poor peasants to industrial wage workers. They should be shown separately in statistics.

It is equally important to include the farm wage laborers. The statistics on farm wage laborers are incomplete. Even so, it is apparent that they are a very important group. Among the white farm population, they are as numerous as all independent rich and middle farmers. Among the Negro farm population, they exceed in number the total of Negro independent commercial farmers of all classes. Table 8 shows, as percentages of total white and Negro farm population, the complete

TABLE 8. CLASS STRUCTURE IN AGRICULTURE, THREE SOUTHERN STATES, 1950

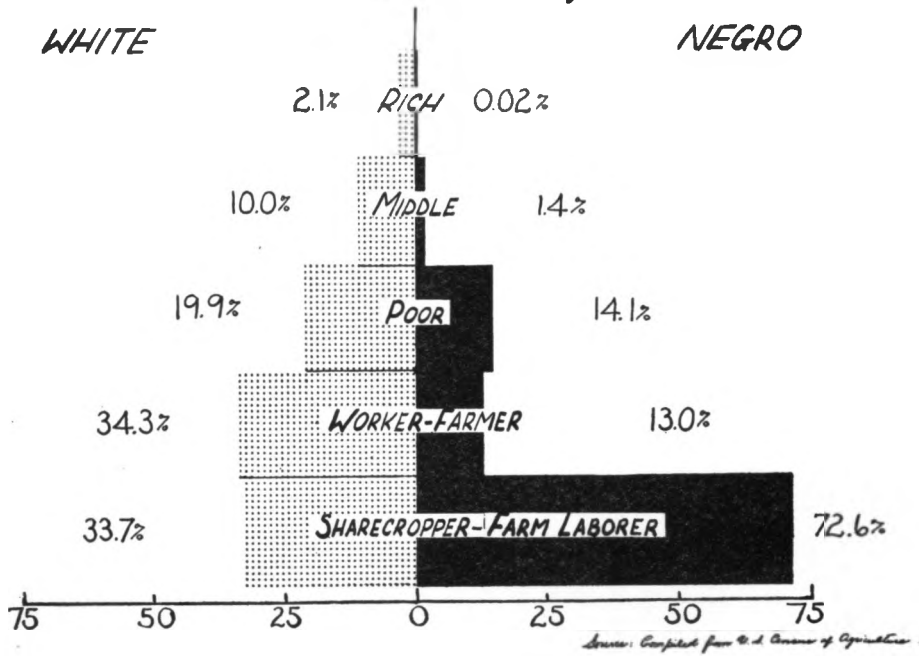
(*Percent of Farm Population*)

	South Carolina		Alabama		Mississippi	
Class	*White*	*Negro*	*White*	*Negro*	*White*	*Negro*
Independent farmers:						
rich	2.1	*	1.4	*	2.0	*
middle	10.0	1.4	6.9	1.1	7.1	0.7
poor	19.9	14.1	24.7	18.6	26.4	11.1
Worker-farmers	34.3	13.0	33.1	21.8	35.4	11.6
Dependent workers:						
sharecroppers	21.9	39.2	24.0	31.5	22.5	58.4
farm wage laborers	11.8	33.4	9.9	26.9	6.6	18.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* Less than 0.05 percent. Sum of items may not equal 100.0 because of rounding of decimals.

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Agriculture,* State Table 16, and *Population,* State Table 20a.)

CLASS STRUCTURE IN AGRICULTURE SOUTH CAROLINA, 1950



Source: Compiled from U.S. Census of Agriculture 1950

class structure in three southern states. The chart on page 61 shows the same figures for South Carolina.

Table 8 shows: among the white farm people one-tenth are rich and middle independent farmers; one-fourth are poor independent farmers; one-third are worker-farmers; a little less than one-third labor for the richer farmers and landlords, either as sharecroppers or wage laborers.

Among the Negro farm people, one one-hundredth are rich and middle independent farmers; one-seventh are poor independent farmers; one-seventh are worker-farmers; more than two-thirds labor for the richer farmers and landlords as sharecroppers or wage laborers.

One-third of the white farm people, and two-thirds of the Negro farm people work for the comparatively small number—almost all white—at or near the top of the agricultural ladder.

The power in southern agriculture is concentrated in the 2% of the white farm people, or 1% of the total farm population, in the rich farmer groups. Next, the reasonably well-off, "family-sized" farms are limited to the 8% of the white farm people, and 1% of the Negro farm people, in the independent middle farmer group. This concentration of power, this extreme narrowing of the upper and middle sections of the class pyramid, shows that the old South has *not* gotten over the effects of the failure to accomplish real land reform after the Civil War; that recent changes in Southern agriculture have not produced a substantial body of rich and middle, independent, reasonably prosperous farmers such as exist in the remainder of the country.

On the contrary, these changes have reduced the number of middle farmers, made still more unreal the myth of the "independent family-sized farmer" in southern agriculture.

VI. GROWING CONCENTRATION IN SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE

THE CLASS STRUCTURE in southern agriculture is changing more rapidly than at any other time since Reconstruction. And the direction of change hardly accords with the liberal fairy stories about the breakup of plantations into moderate-sized Negro-owned and operated farms. Actually, the number and power of large-scale commercial agricultural enterprises is increasing with seven-league boots. The number of middle farmers, or "family-sized" farmers, is declining. Some are prospering, buying up land and equipment, hiring more labor, becoming large-scale commercial farmers. A much larger number are failing, departing from agriculture or being pushed downward into poverty.

Among the rural poor there is a rapid exclusion from commercial agriculture, together with a growth of subsistence and part-time farming.

Finally, the growing large-scale agriculture is more and more absentee-owned, operated by managers for specialized corporations, or rented from banks and insurance companies.

One indicator of concentration—not the best—is the size of farm in terms of acreage. From the Civil War down to 1930 there was a steady decline in the number of very large farms in the South. The old latifundia of the slave-owners were being parceled out among the increasing number of sharecroppers; and thus for statistical purposes appearing as an increased number of small farms. At the same time, huge acreages of formerly idle farm land were abandoned altogether, or sold for non-farming purposes.

But during the past two decades there has been a new trend, an increasing number of very large farm units, highly mechanized capitalist enterprises, combined with a reduction in the number of smaller farms, both independent and sharecropper

units. During these twenty years the number of farms of 1,000 acres or more doubled or tripled in each of the six states studied, while the total number of farms decreased by 15% to 20%, except in North Carolina.

These trends have been gaining momentum, and were more pronounced in the first five years after World War II than in any previous period. The fall in the number of small- and medium-sized farms has been faster, and along with it, since 1940, there has been a sharp rise in the number of very small dwarf farms.

During the 1940-50 decade there were increases in the number of farms in each of the three largest size groups in every one of the six states studied. There were also increases in the number of farms in each of the two tiniest size groups. In most or all of the four small- and middle-sized groups there were reductions. For example, in Georgia there were increases of 77% in the number of farms of 1,000 acres and over, 30% in farms of 500-999 acres, and 9% in farms of 260-499 acres. But the 180-259 acre group showed a 9% decline, and the three next smaller groups (100-179 acres, 50-99 acres, and 30-49 acres) each showed a decline of 17%. At the bottom of the size scale, among the farms too small to produce a livelihood, there was an increase of 6% in the 10-29 acre group, and 55% in the dwarf farms of under 10 acres.[1] (Very tiny specialty farms—*e.g.*, vegetable farms—can actually be large commercial enterprises. But hardly any of the southern dwarf farms are of this type.)

It is much more significant to examine the changes in the number of farms in different *economic* size groups. Anna Rochester showed a considerable increase in the proportion of southern farms with very large production during the first three decades of the present century.[2] Unfortunately, it is difficult to compare pre-war value of product distributions with those for 1950, mainly because of changes in Census methods. Formerly farms were grouped according to the *total* value of farm products. In the 1950 Census they were grouped according to the total value of farm products *sold*. The 1945 Census gave both kinds of tabulations. Therefore it is possible to make a direct measurement of the increase in economic concentration between 1945 and 1950. In doing this, allowance must be made for the increase of 27% in prices received by farmers between 1944 and

1949 (The Census reports the value of farm products sold in the previous year.) Using an approximate adjustment of 25%, because the Census groupings make that convenient, this means that a farm selling $4,000 of products in 1944 is equivalent to one selling $5,000 in 1949, and so on.

The increase in concentration between 1945 and 1950 in Mississippi is shown by Table 9. The number of very rich farms more than doubled. There was an increase of 50% in the number of Class II farms, and 38% in the number of Class III, or upper middle farms. But the number of lower middle farms was reduced by one-fifth, and of the poor farms in Class V by more than 32,000 in number, or 38%.

TABLE 9. ECONOMIC CONCENTRATION IN MISSISSIPPI AGRICULTURE, 1945-1950

Number of farms

Commercial Class of farm	1945	1950	Increase or decrease(−) *number*	*percent*
Subsistence (a)	12,149	15,988	3,839	31.6
Subsistence (b)	23,512	41,521	18,009	76.6
Part-time & VI	115,967	118,714	2,747	2.4
V	84,465	51,991	−32,474	−38.4
IV	19,709	15,855	− 3,854	−19.6
III	2,962	4,096	1,134	38.3
II	1,338	2,029	691	51.6
I	495	1,037	542	109.5
Grand Total	260,597	251,231	− 9,366	− 3.6
Total V & larger	108,969	75,008	−33,961	−31.2

(SOURCES: *Census of Agriculture*, 1940, Vol. I, Part 2, State Table 7; and *Agriculture*, Economic Area Tables 8 and 12. Classes of farms correspond to those defined in the Census and described on p. 54 of the text. Subsistence (a) farms are those with no sales, subsistence (b) farms are those with some sales but less than $250 in 1949. In making the tabulation for 1944, some interpolation was necessary for the "subsistence (b)" and "part-time & VI" farms because the Census groupings did not exactly correspond.

In short, the 2,000 additional rich and upper middle farmers (Classes I, II, and III), displaced 36,000 lower middle and

poor farmers (Classes IV and V). They also displaced many thousands more of very poor farmers (Class VI), but the exact number cannot be determined, because these are grouped with part-time farmers, who increased in number, in the third line of Table 9. Altogether, then, there was a drop of at least 34,000 in the number of commercial farmers. Other statistics indicate that about 20,000 of these were sharecroppers, the remainder independent farmers.

Along with the drop in middle and small commercial farmers, there was a sharp rise in the number of dwarf subsistence farmers, shown in the two top lines of the table. These increased by 18,000, in addition to the increase in the number of part-time farmers included in the third line of the table.

Figures for South Carolina show a similar result, except that here there was a decrease in the number of upper middle farmers (Class III), in contrast to the increase in Mississippi.

What is really remarkable is not the direction of these changes but their extraordinary speed. This very rapid concentration of southern agriculture has not had calamitous effects because of the continued high level of non-farm employment during most of the post-war years. As a result most of the huge numbers of displaced small and lower-middle farmers were able to get jobs elsewhere. Continuation of this trend in the next period of depression could lead to extreme suffering for hundreds of thousands.

Absentee Ownership

The process of concentration in southern agriculture goes hand in hand with the developing concentration of ownership in the economy as a whole. To an increasing extent farming enterprises are owned not by rich farmers, but by rich capitalists who are not farmers and by corporations. For a long period a substantial part of the proceeds of agriculture have been drained by railroads, banks, food processors, etc. Traditionally, this has been through the extraction of interest on farm mortgages, through excessive transportation charges, low prices paid

for farm products, etc. But today direct ownership of farm enterprises by non-farm capital plays an important role.

In the six southern states studied 69.4% of the farm land was owned by white farmers, 6.5% by Negro farmers, and 24.1% by non-farmers in 1950.[3] Thus absentee landlords owned four times as much land as all Negro farmers, and one-third as much as all white operating farmers. This is shown in the pie-chart on page 68. A considerable proportion of the land owned by white farmers is the land of "gentlemen farmers" and worker-farmers, who figure but little in production for the market. Considering only the land in "commercial" farms, approximately 30% was owned by non-farmers.[4]

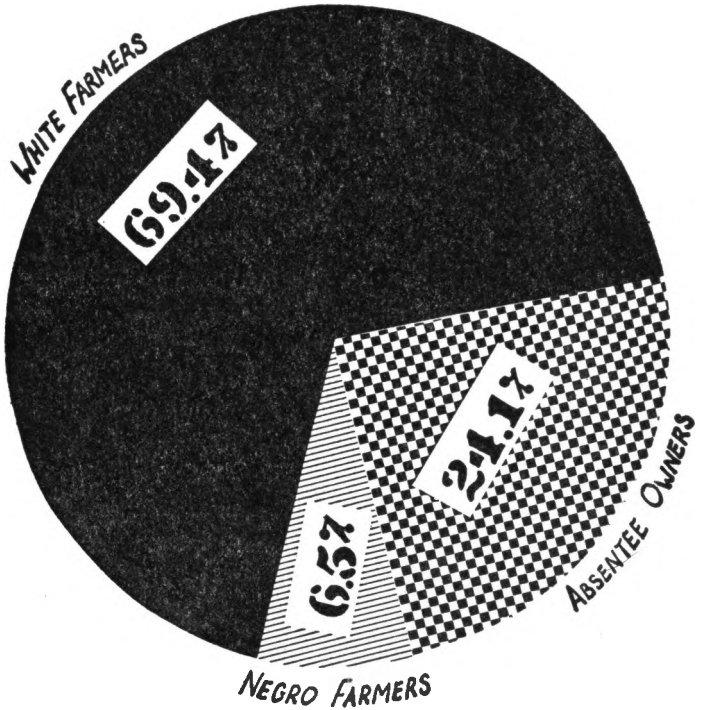
Outside ownership is most pronounced in the areas of specialized large-scale agriculture. For example, in the Upper Delta area of Mississippi absentee ownership was 42.9%, in the sugar area of Louisiana 55.5%, and in the rice area of Louisiana 41.9%.[5] Absentee ownership is also pronounced in the main plantation areas of the old South, where the special exploitation of the Negro rural population is most lucrative. There is least absentee ownership in the mountain counties. Here the population consists mainly of small white farmers, who have successfully maintained their independence of the landlords for well over 100 years—but have not maintained their independence of the capitalists. A majority of the mountain farm families now obtain their principal incomes from factory and other off-farm work.

Absentee ownership has been increasing particularly fast in the old South. Between 1945 and 1950 the acreage of farm land operated by farm managers remained approximately unchanged in the country as a whole, but increased 21% in the six southern states studied.[6] The banker grip on agriculture through mortgage indebtedness has also increased most in the old South. Between 1945 and 1951 the farm mortgage debt nationally increased 18%, in the six southern states studied 54%.[7]

The domination of southern agriculture by monopoly processing firms has increased. Anderson, Clayton and Co. (its former president, Will Clayton, was Under Secretary of State in the Truman Administration) is the largest merchandiser of cotton in the world. It owns extensive warehouses, compresses, cottonseed oil mills and cotton gins, insurance, seed breeding and crop

FARM LAND OWNERSHIP

SIX SOUTHERN STATES - 1950



Source: U.S. Census '50

financing enterprises, as well as huge cotton acreages in the United States and abroad. The sales of Anderson, Clayton and Co. rose more than four times between 1945 and 1951, exceeding a billion dollars in the latter year. Its profits increased five-fold over the same interval. In 1951 Anderson, Clayton and Co. sold one-fifth of all the cotton produced in the United States (about one-eighth before World War II). While the directors of Anderson, Clayton and Co. are Texans, its bankers are the Guaranty Trust Company and J. P. Morgan and Co.[8]

The Wesson Oil and Snowdrift Co. in 1949 owned 68 oilmills, 26 fertilizer mixing plants, 9 peanut shelling plants, 7 refineries and shortening plants, 1 linseed oil refinery, 100 cotton gins. It sells one-fifth of all the cottonseed oil in the United States.[9]

The tobacco crop continues to be controlled by the Big Four tobacco companies.

What is the historical significance of growing absentee ownership and control in the plantation areas? After the Civil War, northern bankers and capitalists restored the property of the former slaveholders. But they imposed debts on them, owned the railroads going through the South, owned the industries supplying the South and processing its materials. They became partners in the plunder of the Negro people, and held the controlling strings. Meanwhile Northern capital developed into modern monopoly capital, with its huge financial-industrial empires absorbing all previously independent bits and pieces. Southern landlordism is no longer merely a subordinate ally of this power, but is increasingly merged with it.

Southern landlords branch out, become stockowners and sometimes directors in leading corporations. Corporate enterprises, financed through investment bankers and insurance companies, take over control of the richest plantations. More and more Wall Street becomes the direct exploiter of the Negro people and poor whites in the South; the Wall-Street-landlord marriage becomes the direct instigator of white chauvinism and the national oppression of the Negro people.

VII. THE CROPPER AND PLANTATION SYSTEM

EXPLOITATION IN SOUTHERN agriculture differs from that in the rest of the country. It is based not on wage labor alone, but on sharecropper labor and wage labor, with sharecropper labor the main form.

Allen writes: "Sharecropping and the related forms of labor which prevail in the plantation area are direct survivals of chattel slavery."[1]

After the Civil War the Negro people were betrayed by the northern capitalists and the United States Government. U.S. troops forcibly prevented the ex-slaves from taking the land they had developed over so many generations. The Congress failed to pass land reform legislation. The white planters were left in ownership of the land, and in complete economic and political domination over the Negro people.

The mass of ex-slave labor was forced, by U.S. Government pressure, by southern state laws, by hunger, to work for the planters on their terms. The resulting form of exploitation was the sharecrop system, scarcely less onerous than the slave system. The sharecropper is hired not by the day, as under wage labor, but by the year. The sharecropper works a parcel of land assigned by the owner, and is paid not by wages, but by crediting of a portion of the crop. In addition, he and his family must be available to work on that portion of land not assigned to sharecroppers, but reserved as the "home farm" of the landlord. This work is credited as wage labor, but is more like the labor of the feudal serf on the lands of the manorial lord.

The actual payment of the sharecropper is mainly neither in commodities nor in cash, but in the furnishing of subsistence, in amount decided by the landlord. In this respect the system

continues to resemble slavery. Instead of receiving cash wages, the sharecropper is often charged with a net debt, which he must work off the next year.

While the planters lost much from the Civil War, they had certain compensations. Prior to the Civil War, the dream of the white planters of reducing the poor whites to the status of slaves, and hence increasing their profits, could not be realized, for slavery could not have been maintained against the combined resistance of Negro and white slaves. However, the new system of exploitation, involving "free" labor, could and was extended to the poor whites as well. As agriculture in the South became more concentrated, hundreds of thousands of small white farmers lost their land. Many became city workers. But many others became wage laborers or sharecroppers on the plantations. They became subject to the same type of most extreme exploitation as the Negro farm population. The planters could profit from their labor as well as that of the Negro people.

The sharecropper system is based on intensive cultivation by hand labor. It is used primarily for cultivation of the main cash crops, cotton, tobacco, and peanuts.

As the rural population grew faster than the demand for all-year labor, the planters drove the surplus sharecropper families off the land. From these surplus laborers, residing in nearby villages and towns, starving or subsisting from seasonal work in lumbering, road work, etc., the planters derived casual purely wage labor for their peak seasons.

Use of sharecropper labor in the South reached its peak in 1930, and has been cut about in half since that time. Before 1930, while the total number of sharecroppers was increasing, there was a breaking up of many of the old large plantations. The Census of 1910 reported 39,073 plantations with 5 or more tenant families. The Census of 1940, covering a larger area, reported 21,751 plantations.[2] Allowing for differences in definition, there was clearly a big drop. While 1945 and 1950 Census figures are on a distinctly different basis, and do not enumerate plantations as such, a further decline is indicated.

What has happened is that the plantation owner needs fewer croppers than formerly to raise a given amount of cotton. Today the majority of croppers are employed on plantations of

rich and middle farmers who use from 1 to 4 croppers each. Giant plantations, hiring 20 or more croppers, remain. They dominate agriculture only in the Delta of the Mississippi River—principally in a section of the State of Mississippi, but also in parts of Arkansas and Louisiana. A lesser concentration of giant plantations remains in the coastal plains tobacco area of North Carolina. Elsewhere large plantations are scattered throughout the old plantation area.[3]

Scope of Plantations

The continued importance of sharecropper exploitation is measured not by the remaining giant plantations, but by these taken together with the rich and middle farmers who hire smaller numbers of sharecroppers. The 1950 Census reported 147,829 of these "multiple-unit operations" in the South, covering not only the six states generally studied in this book, but sections of other states as well.

These multiple-unit landlords employed a total of 331,874 cropper families and 107,726 other tenants, mainly share tenants.[4] This Census was so constructed as to minimize the number and size of the plantation-type operations. Only those landlords using the cropper form of arrangement were included. Those landlords using only other forms—notably crop-share tenants, were excluded. Since this type of arrangement is more important than the cropper arrangement in many areas, notably in Alabama and the sugar and rice areas of Louisiana, it is clear that plantation-type farms are left out in this way. Moreover, for the many landlords having both croppers and crop-share tenants, the acreage and production of the crop-share tenants were excluded from the statistics of "multiple-unit operations."

Even with these statistical limitations the Census shows the multiple-unit operations accounting for 22.8% of the land in farms, 27.0% of the cropland harvested, 36.4% of the cotton, 30.7% of the tobacco, and 33.8% of the peanuts.[6] This covers a broad area embracing all or parts of 14 states, including substantial fringe areas in Texas, Florida, Maryland and Kentucky, where the multiple-unit operations carry less weight.

Allowing for the production of the share-crop and other tenant units left out of the 1950 statistics, and restricting attention to the six states covered in this study, it is safe to say that the plantation-type operations account for more than half of the output of cotton and almost half that of tobacco and peanuts, the main Southern crops. Moreover, there has been no general reduction in this proportion during the years since World War II.

In the cotton state of Mississippi, 74% of all cotton was raised on multiple-unit farms in 1945. In 1950 the reported figures showed only 65%, but when adjustments are made to put the 1950 figures on the same basis as in 1945 it turns out that about 76% of the cotton was raised on plantation-type operations, defined as in the earlier year.

Similar calculations indicate a decline in the plantation proportion of cotton in South Carolina from 60% to 51%, and an increase in the plantation proportion of tobacco in North Carolina from 45% to 47%, both in the five-year period.[6]

Among the planters using sharecropper labor, the same process of concentration is going on as in Southern agriculture as a whole. The total number of plantations has decreased, but the average number of croppers and the average acreage has increased. There was a definite increase in the land area of very large plantations. This is shown in Table 10:

TABLE 10. PLANTATION-TYPE OPERATIONS 1945 AND 1950, SIX SOUTHERN STATES

	1945	*1950*	*% change*
Number of plantation-type operations	125,689	96,093	–23.5
Number of croppers and other tenants	368,102	295,929	–19.6
Land (000 acres)	38,389	35,186	– 8.3
Number 1,000 acres and over	6,278	5,581	–11.1
Land in those 1,000 acres and over	12,219	12,674	3.7

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Multiple Unit Operations*: 1945, County Tables II and III, Multiple Unit Table I; 1950, Economic Area Table I. Statistics include, for 1950, tenants and land included in entire "landlord tenant" operations of multiple-unit operators. Data for North Carolina restricted to 78 counties for which comparison could be made in the 2 Censuses.)

Because of the change in definition, a considerable number of plantations classified as 1,000 acres and more in 1945 were classified in a smaller group in 1950. If the definition were the same, there would probably be shown an increase in the number of plantations of 1,000 acres and more, as well as in their total acreage. Where crop production has held its own, the plantation has held its own and the large plantation has expanded.

One example is provided by North Carolina. Here the main crop is tobacco, which has not suffered a decline in acreage. While the number of plantation-type operations was reduced 9.9% between 1945 and 1950, their acreage increased 8.3%. The number of plantations of 1,000 acres and over increased 23.1%, and their acreage 60.4%.

In the Upper Delta area of Mississippi, cotton acreage has been fairly well maintained. Postwar changes in this area are shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11. PLANTATIONS AND SINGLE-UNIT FARMS, UPPER DELTA AREA OF MISSISSIPPI, 1945 AND 1950

	1945	*1950*	*% change*
Plantation-type operations:			
Number	5,034	5,259	4.5
Acreage (000's)	2,613	2,687	2.8
1,000 acres and over:			
Number	766	682	−11.0
Acreage (000's)	932	1,396	49.8
Farms outside plantations:			
Number	5,282	4,599	−12.9
Acreage (000's)	348	581	67.0

(SOURCES: *Multiple Unit Operations,* 1945, Type-of-farming Area Tables II and III, [Area 1]; *Multiple Unit Operations,* 1950, Economic Area Table 1, and *Agriculture,* Economic Area Table 1, [Area 1].)

Here the overwhelming domination of the plantation-type operations, using cropper labor as well as wage labor, continues. The scope of these operations even expanded, with a rapid increase in the size of the giant operations. These increased their acreage by half. At the same time there was a reduction of one-eighth in the number of non-plantation farms, with an increase of two-thirds in their acreage. This shows a rapid rise in the large-scale purely capitalist enterprises, which, however, re-

main small in scope as compared with the plantation-type operations. Sharecropper labor is still used on farming operations embracing four-fifths of the total farm area. Giant plantations and corporate farms using purely wage labor are displacing the remaining independent family-type farm operators.

The widespread use of sharecropper labor makes a mockery of the official concept of the "family-sized" farm. The only farms in the South which have the investment and the size to fit the definition of a "family-sized" farm are the rich and upper-middle farmers. But these also fail to meet the official requirements of a modern *family* farm, "which furnishes maximum, productive employment for an average farm family assuming justifiable use of labor saving equipment . . . one which an average farm family can operate successfully without employing outside labor."[7]

In the actual social relations prevailing in the South, once a farmer is able to acquire the property for a "family-sized" farm, he proceeds to hire sharecroppers, to seek the highest profit not from his independent family labor and ample equipment, but from exploitation of sharecropper labor. This applies to the handful of rich and middle Negro farmers, as well as to whites. Thus in the southern states as a whole the 147,829 operators of multiple units include 10,253 Negroes. As in every other aspect, the plantation-type farms of the Negro rich and middle farmers are smaller and poorer than those of the whites. But the main point is that this form of exploitation, based on the special oppression of the Negro people, is so pervasive that it also is typical of the class relations among the Negro people, to the extent that an exploiting class has developed among them.

Census statistics indicate that in Georgia, the majority of the rich and middle independent farmers, whether full or part owners, or cash tenants, employed croppers in 1950. This was true for both Negro and white farmers, except for Negro cash tenants. In South Carolina and Mississippi, not only the rich and middle farmers, but some of the smaller independent farmers employed croppers.

In discussing the difficulties of establishing Negroes as operators of "family-size, owner-operated" farms, J. R. Thomas, State Itinerant Teacher Trainer, Virginia State College, listed as one

of the obstacles: "Another problem is securing desirable tenants; that is, renters and cropsharers."[8] Even when the southern experts talk of the family-sized farm, they actually think of the standard form of successful southern farming, based on exploitation of sharecrop labor.

Sharecropping Versus Wage Labor

Employment of sharecroppers and their families continues to exceed employment of farm wage laborers in the old South.

In the six states in 1950, there were at the time of the Census 262,639 farm wage laborers; 243,484 croppers, the form of tenure with the most pronounced feudal-slave characteristics, and 459,369 sharecroppers of all types, including croppers, cropshare tenants, etc.[9] In each of the six states the number of sharecroppers exceeded the number of farm wage laborers.

These figures are incomplete. The number of wage laborers, averaged over the year, would be considerably higher than the number in the Census month. The Census of Population omitted farm laborers under 14 years of age. Furthermore, the Census just failed to count a considerable number of farm laborers as in the labor force.

However, the figures on croppers and total sharecroppers omit still more. They omit all workers, adult and child, other than the head of the family. A husband and wife working as farm laborers count as two farm laborers. But a husband and wife working a cropper plot count as one cropper. Even at the relatively slack Census time, there were from 1.5 to 2 persons working on the average sharecropper plot.

Taking these adjustments into consideration, it appears that the number of workers under all sharecropping systems was perhaps three times the number of farm wage workers, and the number of workers under the cropper system was perhaps one and a half times the number of farm wage workers.

The predominance of sharecropper labor is especially marked in cotton, tobacco, and peanut farming. In other kinds of farming, sharecropper labor is not important. Roughly speaking, there were four times as many sharecroppers as wage laborers on North Carolina cotton farms, and over three times as many

on tobacco farms. But in all other kinds of farming, wage laborers exceeded sharecroppers four to one.[10]

In recent decades the reduction in cotton acreage, and the increased mechanization of planter and rich farmer agriculture, have reduced the demand for both kinds of labor. But sharecropping has held its own as the main form of exploitation in the old South. Between 1940 and 1950 in the six states studied the number of croppers was reduced 32.6%, but the number of farm wage laborers was reduced 37.8%. There were important differences among the states in this respect.

In North and South Carolina and Georgia the decline in the number of farm laborers was much more severe than in the number of croppers. Bearing in mind that wage labor is relatively more important in dairy, poultry and livestock farming than in cotton and other row-crop farming, this must mean that the cutting of labor requirements based on mechanization of agriculture proceeded much more rapidly in these "diversified" branches of agriculture than in the old cash crop branches.

In the two westernmost states of the deep South, Mississippi and Louisiana, the number of croppers decreased more rapidly than the number of farm laborers. Here, it is indicated, especially for the Delta area of mechanized cotton production, there was a certain shift from sharecropper labor to wage labor; but not enough to prevent an absolute decline in the number of wage laborers employed.

The above statistics refer to those more or less regularly employed as farm wage laborers. Throughout the area studied, there has been a sharp increase in the number of farmers employing hired labor for brief peak periods. This applies even on a considerable minority of the cropper units. For example, those landlords now using machinery for plowing do not trust the croppers to operate the tractors, but hire outside workers.

Farm labor becomes increasingly casual and unsettled. Wage workers hired by the month have become a rarity. Hiring by the day or hour is the rule. The displaced sharecropper and regular hired laborers are converted into casual workers in the towns or migratory farm laborers. Farm owners increasingly turn to these homeless ones to insure the maximum picking of crops at low cost.

The growing supply of migratory and casual workers tends to undermine the sharecropping system—but not to destroy it. For once the landlords depended wholly on the migratory wage laborers, these laborers would cease to be migrants. They would have more stable jobs and an improved bargaining position. The combination of sharecropper labor and casual employment of fired sharecroppers for wages offers the prospect of lowest total labor costs and highest profits—with the maximum of misery to the workers.

Characteristics of the Sharecropping System

The United States Government, under its "Point Four" program, made pretenses of aiding peasants in other countries. In order to sell this program, it had to show "credentials" of accomplishment at home. So the late Dr. Henry G. Bennett, as Administrator of the Point Four program, boasted: "We have not always had laws that adequately protected and gave incentive to tenant farmers, and we have not always firmly enforced the laws we had. But we believe that much progress has been made and that most of the tenancy arrangements we now have are generally fair to both tenant and landlord."[11]

This credential is falsified.

The relationship between landlord and sharecropper has remained virtually unchanged for almost 90 years. A North Carolina farm official, a supporter of the plantation system, wrote in 1950:

> To this day very few changes have been made to this original agreement which so adequately met the situation. As new elements, such as the use of commercial fertilizers, livestock, and mechanization have emerged, there have been some adjustments, but they have not changed the characteristics of the cropper system. . . .
>
> Much of the old plantation system type of farming with overseers and hired labor is still in evidence on some of the larger farms.[12]

The U.S. Census of Agriculture for 1950 gives this definition: "Croppers are crop-share tenants whose landlords furnish all the workpower. The landlords either furnish all the work animals or furnish tractor power in lieu of work animals. Croppers usually work under the close supervision of the landowners or their

agents and the land assigned them is often merely a part of a larger enterprise operated as a single unit."[13] The croppers and landlords work under an agreement. But this agreement is so one-sided that it would be instantly thrown out of any court if it were concluded between two businessmen, instead of between a landlord controlling the courts and a voteless Negro, member of an oppressed nation. Another North Carolina farm official admits: "The cropper agreement has many features which prevent an efficient agriculture and bar adjustment of farming systems. The agreements are oral, last for one year, are indefinite and incomplete, and lack compensation clauses. Almost every defect of leases . . . is present in the cropper agreement."[14]

The situation is stated more bluntly and truthfully by Harry Haywood:

> Close supervision over the sharecropper, his abject servility and blind obedience to the slightest whim of the landlord, are requisites of "successful" cropper farming. The decision as to what shall be planted and when remains with the landlord. "Furnishing" the cropper means that the landlord determines what food he shall eat and the amount.
>
> He decides also the tools with which the cropper works, the amount of fertilizer he uses, the mule he is allowed for plowing. The landlord also sets the length of the cropper's workday which, in the cropper's own language, is "from ken see to can't see." In many cases, the overseer is a "pistol-totin'" deputy, devoted to carrying out the landlord's edicts.[15]

The following examples reveal that in the most vital aspects, the sharecropping system today is as bad as or worse than ever.

Landlord Control of Farm Operations

The Goverment publication *Making Ends Meet on Less than* $2,000 *a Year* describes the landlord-tenant relations of two Arkansas plantation tenant families as of 1950. The Canton family are sharecroppers. Their landlord made a whole series of unitemized deductions from their share of the crop: "The Canton family raised 13 bales of cotton last year, 6.5 bales were calculated as the family's share. The plantation operator gins and sells the entire crop, the sharecropper having no voice in the handling of his share. . . . After the operator made his deductions for their expenses the family cleared $80 from the sale of 6.5 bales of cotton."[16]

To put this $80 return in perspective, 6.5 bales of cotton were worth over $1,100 in 1949!

The Arthur family of cash tenants were controlled by the landlord as if they were sharecroppers. When they complained of padded accounts, the landlord added still more to his charges. They paid, for fear that the landlord would keep them from getting work anywhere.[17]

The croppers, not permitted to raise their food requirements, and not paid in cash, are compelled to obtain subsistence commodities and farm operating supplies from the landlord at exorbitant prices and with outrageous interest charges.

The Arthur family, mentioned above, was victimized by this furnish system. By means of "furnish" charges, and rigging of crop accounts, the family ended the year with debts bigger than its income.

In the area of the North Carolina study: "The majority of the croppers operate under the 'furnish' system. In 1949, living expenses were financed by the landlords for 78.4% of the croppers surveyed. . . . Farm operating expenses were financed for 88.7% of the croppers. This system ties up for consumption capital needed by the landlord and croppers for production. The cost of this credit to the cropper is high. . . ."[18]

The study gives an interest rate of 10% of the amount advanced, or "an annual interest rate of 25 to 35%." This corresponds to the basic interest charge mentioned in pre-war studies, even though general interest rates had declined. The pre-war study of Raper and Reid mentions an additional 20% "credit price" charge—that is, a premium price. The North Carolina report does not mention this, but there can be little doubt that the landlords still charge premium prices for the products they sell the croppers. Raper estimated that the combined effect of the credit price and the 10% interest charge made an effective interest rate of 60% per year.

Semi-Serf Status of the Cropper

The wage laborer has the freedom to leave his job and seek a better one. The cropper is tied to the landlord's farm for a year's time, and often lacks the freedom to leave even then. He and

members of his family must get the landlord's permission to work off the plantation. He must not only do all the work on the plot assigned him, but is required to work on the landlord's home farm as required. Thus he pays the feudal dues in labor for the lord of the manor, plus half the crop raised on his assigned plot. At the same time, he lacks some advantages of the feudal serf, in that the landlord can throw him off the plantation at any time.

North Carolina professors found that sharecroppers did relatively little industrial work in slack season:

> If the objective of the landlord is to obtain the greatest net return for the use of his resources, he will not be likely to look favorably upon the tenant's engaging in off-farm work except on the landlord's farm. In the Southern Piedmont Area, it is commonly specified in rental agreements that the landlord shall have first call upon the tenant's labor if the tenant is available for off-farm work.[19]

As will be seen, this is not always the case. There are some planters who find it profitable to encourage their croppers to work in town.

The border between sharecropping and outright peonage is not well marked. In many cases the landlord oversteps this bound and forcibly holds the sharecropper against his will. Occasionally this is revealed when a landlord is prosecuted for peonage. Undoubtedly in the great majority of cases no prosecution takes place. Stetson and Kay Kennedy, on the basis of prolonged research in the South, submitted a fully documented account of peonage to the United Nations. In one of many exhibits a Negro worker, Will Fleming, swore in an affidavit that he had been held on a Georgia plantation for 20 years to "work the debt out," and put on the chain-gang when he attempted to escape. The Kennedys estimate that there are over 300,000 Negroes and a considerable number of whites, mainly sharecroppers, held in peonage.[20]

The persistence of peonage confirms the continued validity of Allen's characterization of sharecropping as a direct survival of chattel slavery. The next chapter shows that it is a highly profitable survival.

VIII. SHARECROPPING, A SYSTEM OF EXTREME EXPLOITATION

How CAN IT be that the obsolete sharecropping system, whose imminent demise has been announced again and again during the past two decades, survives as a major factor?

One reason is its special political-economic role as the basis for the special oppression of the Negro people in the United States. As has been shown elsewhere, American big business gets $4 billion of extra profits annually out of this.[1] The corporations have a stake in buttressing this semi-feudal system, through government subsidies, price supports, crop controls, and private credits.

An additional reason, of prime importance, is that the plantation system is one which directly yields big profits by getting the maximum immediate cash return out of the soil. It does this by ruining the soil, by foisting on the South an unbalanced agriculture, by killing through malnutrition, overwork, and lack of medical care millions of the Negro people on the plantations. But so long as ever-added applications of fertilizer can counteract erosion and over-use of soil, the landlords and bankers will continue this process, so profitable to them in the immediate present.

One myth fostered by the white supremacists is that the croppers are lazy, indolent, unproductive, a "burden" on their backs that they "paternally" carry by running the plantations.

The fact is, that under the pressure of the landlord's overseers, and driven by their own needs to produce the maximum of cash crops in order to eat, sharecropping functions as a rural Bedeaux system, which for all its social waste, is highly efficient in draining labor out of the croppers and their families.

The common myth is that the cropper system developed more or less "by accident" after the Civil War. The former slave

needed work. The former owner had land, but no money. As a boon to the slave, the planter let him live and work on the land and fed him. He did not pay cash wages because he did not have the cash, but instead gave him half the crop when it came in.

If this were all there were to it, the system would have soon died out and become supplanted by the hiring of wage labor, as the Southern planters became stabilized financially. The apologists for the sharecropping system do not bother to search for an answer to the question—why did this system, starting "by accident," spread for 65 years, and why is it still the dominant system of exploitation in the agrarian South, almost 90 years after the end of the Civil War?

The obvious reason is that the planters find it very profitable, and are able to impose it on the Negro people and poor whites. The noted scholar W. E. B. Du Bois in his *Black Reconstruction* shows that the Southern planters, at the very end of the Civil War, conspired to perpetuate slavery through a system of year-by-year contract labor, which they wrote into the abortive Black Codes of 1865-66. "By accident" this system was legally provided by the "loyal planter" legislatures which the United States Government set up before the Reconstruction Period proper.

The introduction to the volume on Multiple-unit operations of the 1950 Census, after giving the customary "by accident" account of the origin of the system, proceeds to state more or less frankly the advantages to the landlord as compared with hiring of wage labor, and supposed advantages to the tenant: "Multiple-unit operations are closely associated with the production of cotton and tobacco. Because of their high labor requirements, these crops are well suited to this type of operation."

Now the advantages to the landlord:

> It is not necessary for the landlord to risk the large amounts of capital which would be required under a wage system. Risks of production are shared by the tenants. The landlord, through his management and close supervision of the tenants, can exercise control over farming practices. Handling the entire landholding as one management unit permits some economies of large-scale operation which woud not be possible if each tenant operated independently. Sharing in the proceeds from the crop, the tenant is less likely to leave before the crop is completed.

Thus it is cheaper than wage labor; the cropper, unlike a wage laborer, shares the losses; the landlord has the same control and economies of central management as with wage labor, and he is assured of a stable labor supply to an extent impossible with wage labor.

Now the advantages to the tenant: "Workers without funds or managerial experience to set themselves up as independent farm operators, can engage in farming, sharing in the proceeds from their labor in the same manner as independent tenants."[2]

The first "advantage" is dubious, to say the least. The croppers, obtaining the land, would undoubtedly manage it successfully enough, and would be as able as the landlords to learn techniques, use of equipment, etc. The permission to engage in farming is no more meaningful than that "permission" granted their ancestors as slaves. The business about "sharing in the proceeds" is patent nonsense, in view of the fact that the landlord's books make certain that the cropper rarely if ever gets any proceeds.

Southern law and custom reflect the fact that the cropper has no advantage, but is merely exploited differently from the wage earner. As the Census volume puts it, "Traditionally, a cropper has been thought of as a hired worker who is paid a share of the crops in lieu of wages."[3]

This difference in method of payment is crucial. When the worker is paid by the day or hour, the employer seeks to keep as low as possible the number of days of labor needed. *But with the sharecropping system payment for labor is the same no matter how many days or hours are worked.*

Profitability vs. Productivity

Sharecropping productivity per man-hour is low. But *profitability* per dollar of invested capital is very high. Most of the investment is in land, mule or tractor, and supplies. The investment in labor consists of the subsistence supplied the cropper family under the "furnish" system. The main thing for the landlord is to get the cropper and his family to produce the most cotton on a given plot of land, supplied with a given

quantity of fertilizer and "poison." Whether the cropper family puts in 200 hours of labor or 1000 hours of labor to get this return, the cost to the landlord is the same. Thus he has no interest in high productivity per man-hour. Every hour spent in cultivation, in picking the last bolls of cotton, no matter how little it adds to the final yield, pays the landlord.

This is admitted in the technical literature. The North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station, citing the economist D. Gale Johnson, writes: "Under a share-type rental arrangement, the return which the landlord receives for those factors which he owns is maximized when the marginal value productivity of the tenant's labor is zero."[4]

In ordinary English, it pays the landlord to drive the cropper and his family to the point where another hour af labor would yield nothing at all.

This accounts for the still widely-prevalent practice of keeping croppers' children home from school and forcing them to work in the cotton and tobacco fields. It accounts for the persistent preference of southern landlords for sharecropper labor, in face of the advances in machinery which make possible much higher productivity per man-hour using wage labor.

With the sharecropping system the landlord can drive the cropper and his entire family for less than the cash wages of a single hired hand—and in such a way as to get the highest output per acre with the minimum outlay for wages and equipment. The sharecropping system is one whereby the maximum of profits are obtained on the basis of hand labor, with the minimum of modern technique. It is a prime example of the "howling contradiction" which results from the operation of the basic economic law of modern capitalism, the law of maximum profit discovered by Joseph Stalin. Stalin decribes and explains this contradiction as follows:

> We are acquainted with facts from the history and practice of capitalism illustrative of the rapid development of technology under capitalism, when the capitalists appear as the standard-bearers of the most advanced techniques, as revolutionaries in the development of the technique of production. But we are also familiar with facts of a different kind, illustrative of a halt in technical development under capitalism, when the capitalists appear as reactionaries in the development of new techniques and not infrequently resort to hand labor.

How is this howling contradiction to be explained? It can only be explained by the basic economic law of modern capitalism, that is, by the necessity of obtaining the maximum profit. Capitalism is in favor of new techniques when they promise it the highest profit. Capitalism is against new techniques, and for resort to hand labor, when the new techniques do not promise the highest profit."[5]

The 1950 Census supplies data from which this operation of the law of maximum profits can be seen quite clearly. The chart opposite shows the amount of products sold, and farm expenditures, per acre, by tenure of farm operator, for the Upper Delta area of Mississippi.

The value of product sold per acre on the cropper units was three times as much as on the farm manager units, and three and one-third times as much as on the full-owner farms. But farm expenditures per acre on the cropper units were considerably lower than on the manager and full owner units. Farm outlays were 70 cents per dollar of sales on the manager units, 14 cents per dollar of sales on the cropper units.

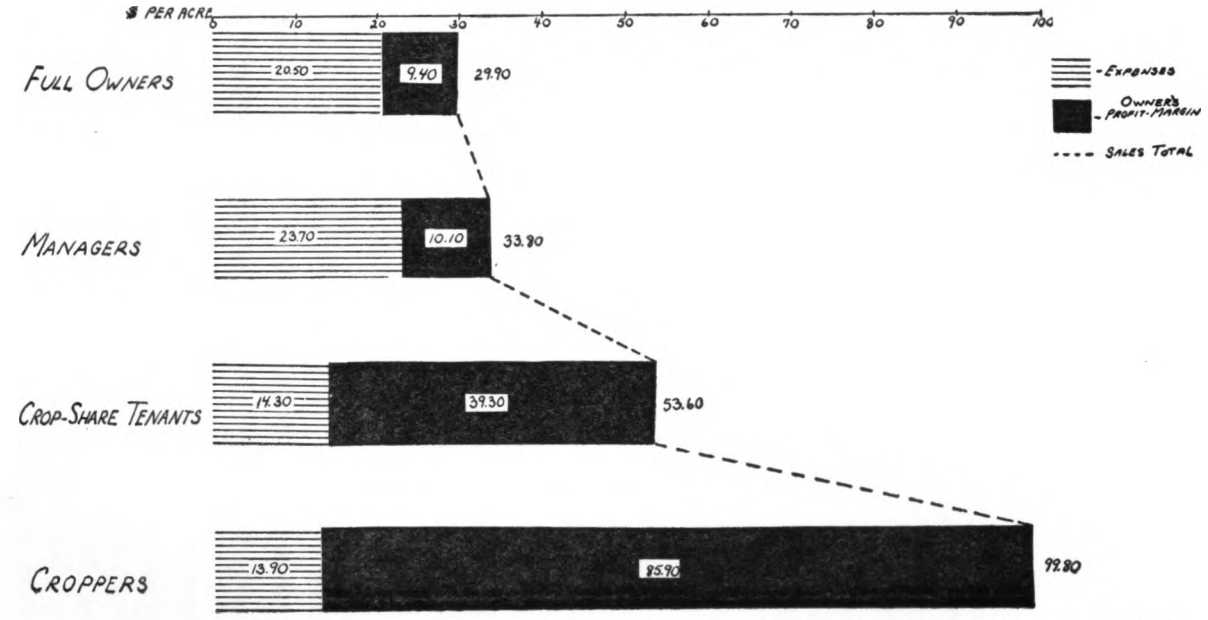
Allowing for the cropper's share in the crop, these figures indicate that landlords obtain a much higher rate of profit from cropper units than do farm managers from farms worked by wage labor. Roughly speaking, the cropper's landlord ends up with two-fifths more per dollar of sales than the manager does; and almost four times as much per acre. Since capital investment is more or less proportional to acreage, the rate of profit on invested capital is similarly several times larger on the cropper unit.

These figures are subject to various qualifications, correction for which would reduce the difference.

But with all due allowances, the central point remains that use of sharecropper labor provides the highest rate of profit—which alone accounts for this technically obsolete form in the face of new machines which should consign the sharecropping system to the scrap-heap.

The high profits from this system are made possible by the national oppression of the Negro people. This is made clear when it is remembered that in the upper Delta of Mississippi, to which the chart applies, the overwhelming majority of the landlords are white, while the overwhelming majority of the croppers are Negro.

FARM SALES AND EXPENDITURES PER ACRE UPPER DELTA, MISSISSIPPI, 1949



Source: AGRICULTURE, Economic Area Tables 6 and 10 (for Area 1)

The point is brought out more forcefully in Table 12—showing state-wide figures for South Carolina, for white and Negro farmers separately.

TABLE 12. SALES PER ACRE AND EXPENSES AS PERCENT OF SALES, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1949

	Sales per Acre		Expenditure as Percent of sales	
Tenure	*White*	*Negro*	*White*	*Negro*
All farms	$15.60	$27.80	51.1	12.7
Commercial farms:				
full owners	16.70	16.50	52.4	17.8
part owners	20.40	22.20	62.2	19.3
managers	11.60	*	75.5	*
cash tenants	22.30	20.80	46.0	14.0
crop-share tenants	42.40	41.10	15.7	9.7
croppers	51.40	55.30	15.7	8.7

* There are too few Negro managers to permit calculation of meaningful averages.

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Agriculture,* State Tables 15 and 16.)

Again the cropper units yield three times as many dollars per acre as the farms of full owners, with a much smaller expense. Moreover, the Negro cropper units yield considerably more dollars per acre than the white cropper units, at a far smaller cost to the landlord. With the existence of a large number of Negro sharecroppers, a smaller number of poor white farmers can be pushed down to the same social status, although never subject to such extreme exploitation as the Negro sharecroppers.

How can this fact of very high profits be squared with the common reports that plantations are increasingly regarded as a sideline by many planters now engaged in Southern industry? It *is* a fact that a large part of the profits from the sharecropping system are taken over by the banks which charge high interest to plantation owners, by the giant cotton and tobacco handling and processing monopolies, by the fertilizer trust, by the railroads, the land speculators who rent or sell to plantation managers. Also many capitalists use bookkeeping tricks to reduce income taxes through fictitious "losses" on farming enterprises they own. All this concerns the division of the spoils.

The fact of increasing direct corporation participation in

sharecrop plantations, the fact that farm land values in the South have increased more rapidly than anywhere else in the country, are the surest signs that this industry is profitable, and increasingly so.

High Cropper Yield

The very high profitability per acre of cropper farms is largely achieved by forcing the cropper to plant almost every inch of ground to the main cash crops and corn for work animals. The value per acre on cropper farms in Mississippi is higher than in South Carolina, not only because of higher cotton yields, but also because more of the Mississippi cropper units are worked with tractor power, hence have no corn acreage for mules but all cash cotton acreage.

In addition, the Negro croppers, under close landlord supervision, are forced through intensive labor to get the utmost out of the land. In North Carolina in 1949 the yield of tobacco of white full owners was 1,111 pounds, of Negro full owners 952 pounds. The yield of white croppers was 1,155 pounds, of Negro croppers 1,118 pounds per acre.[6] In both tenure groups the white farmers, better supplied with fertilizer, equipment, etc., and having better land, obtained more yield than the Negro farmers. But the difference was least marked in the case of croppers, and croppers' farms, both Negro and white, showed higher yields than the farms of white owners—although these were infinitely better supplied and equipped.

The differences are sharper in Mississippi cotton, as shown in Table 13.

In each of the independent tenure groups the white farmers obtained a markedly higher yield than the Negro farmers, owing to the advantages of better land and more capital to hire labor, buy equipment and supplies. But among the dependent crop-share tenants and croppers, the Negroes obtained much higher yields than the whites, despite material disadvantages. Negro croppers obtained twice the yield of Negro full owners, and far higher yields than any category of white farmers, including the large-scale highly capitalized farm managers. Figures for the

upper Delta are particularly instructive. On more or less uniform soil, the croppers obtained an average yield of .807 bales per acre, as against .699 for farm managers and .607 bales for full owners.

TABLE 13. COTTON YIELDS BY COLOR AND TENURE OF OPERATOR, MISSIPPI, 1949.
(*Bales per acre*)

	Entire State		Upper Delta
Tenure	*White*	*Negro*	*White & Negro combined*
All farms	.543	.544	.683
Commercial farms:			
Independent			
Full owners	.531	.357	.607
Part owners	.593	.400	.635
Managers	.697	•	.699
Cash tenants	.549	.392	.537
Dependent			
Crop-share tenants	.614	.663	.649
Croppers	.598	.718	.807

• There are too few Negro managers to permit calculation of meaningful averages.

(SOURCE: Compiled from *Agriculture*, State Table 16, Economic Area Table 10, for State Economic Area 1.)

There were unusual losses from boll weevil and excessive moisture in the central and eastern states in 1949 (27% from boll weevil alone in Mississippi). Allowance for these losses, taken together with yield figures for the entire State of Mississippi in other years, suggests that in normal years the yield of cropper units in the Delta is 1.25 bales per acre or more, *about on a par with the average yield on the irrigated farms of California*, generally regarded as the paragon of efficient, highly productive cotton culture in the United States.

The intensity of exploitation of Negro farmers has been increased since World War II. Getting rid of "surplus" Negro sharecroppers, cutting down the land occupied by Negro farmers, the Southern landowners have put more pressure on the remaining Negro farmers, to get a larger profit out of the smaller number. In 1940, in North Carolina, the average value of farm products sold per acre from farms of Negro operators was 28% more than from farms of white operators. In 1950, the

average per acre for Negro operators was 90% more than for white operators. There was a similar development in each of the six states except Mississippi.[7]

Rates of Profit

An example of how this intense exploitation of Negro croppers pays off is contained in a Florida study. Here, in a recent year, the landlords cleared approximately 25% on the capital invested in cropper and crop-share units.[8] This does not include extra profits made through the "furnish" system.

The Agriculture Department publishes accounts of large commercial "family-operated" cotton farms in the Southern Piedmont. These are really "almost-plantations" of 400 acres, with most of the labor done by 3 cropper families. The farmer made a "net income" of $3,425 in 1951, on a nominal investment of $33,759, or just over 10%. But most of the "investment" consisted of written up land value—that is, the capitalization of the profit being made. Less than one-fourth of the investment consisted of machinery and equipment, livestock, and inventories. Moreover, the profit shown was larger than for any previous year in the 22 covered, and three-to-four times the average cleared during the five years before World War II. In 1951 more profit was made on 3 cropper families than on six in 1929. The 1951 net profit exceeded the entire combined income of the three cropper families who did the labor.[9]

In the light of these facts, what about the liberal economists and sociologists who say that what is required to end the abominable poverty in the South is "greater productivity" on the part of the poor Southern farmer?

Their whole argument becomes bankrupt. They are talking about productivity per man-hour, while the landlord is interested in high productivity per acre, and low total labor cost, regardless of the number of acres worked. The landlord is interested in *the highest profitability,* which he obtains through a system which automatically reduces output per man-hour.

The productivity per man-hour of the croppers could be increased decisively only by giving them more land to till, and more machinery to use. But the landlord does not want this.

If each cropper had a larger patch of land, he would inevitably tend to become more independent; despite all bookkeeping tricks, he would get a cash surplus in good years and be able to break away. With more land to till, he would require from the landlord a heavier investment in machinery. He could not be forced to get so much out of each acre, and could not so easily be freed to work on the home farm in competition with migratory or casual wage labor in the peak chopping and picking seasons.

Earlier in this book there have been quotations from North Carolina county agents and farm officials. Their reports arose out of a several-years experiment in Edgecombe County, where they tried to "improve" and "reform" the plantation system. They were anxious to achieve "increased productivity of our farm people," to help the landlords weed out "inefficient" croppers, to increase the acreage handled by each cropper and mechanize his operation.

But despite the pleadings of the officials, the landlords were unwilling to give their system a "new look." On one farm where there was mechanization as an experiment, the landlord changed back to workstock, when the croppers refused to shoulder the cost of the machinery despite the officials' urging. There was no increase in the average size of the cropper units, because: "The peculiar labor requirements of the cash crops and the desire of the landlords to have plenty of labor available on the farms are largely responsible for the lack of increase in size of cropper units."[10]

From the point of view of the Negro croppers, productivity per man-hour is not the key. They need more land, and the right to appropriate the commodities they produce on this land. That alone would bring about an enormous advance in living standards and social status. Then they would require machinery, supplies, etc., to permit an advance in productivity.

The discussion above brought out the increasing exploitation of sharecroppers through making them work harder. That is the equivalent of the speed-up in factories. In addition, the landlords have been increasing the exploitation of sharecroppers through reducing their share of the crop. That is the equivalent of a direct wage cut in industry.

Worsening of Crop-Division Terms

The United States Government, in its official recommendations to feudal-landlord governments in dependent countries, is often critical of the 50-50 split in the crop which is typical of semi-feudal agriculture the world over. For example, the Economic Survey Mission to the Philippines recommended: "The law, now on the books, providing for a 70-30 percent division of the crop between the tenant and the landlord should be enforced after it is amended to make it more workable."[11]

The United States Government tells its feudal allies that they must make such reforms to "forestall Communism." But concerning the 50-50 crop split in the South, the United States Government has not a word. Actually, the 50-50 split is purely formal. The cropper gets less than his half share, because the landlord prices the crop as he wishes, charges expenses as he wishes, pockets for himself all government subsidies, pays in "furnish" at usurious prices, etc.

Moreover, recent trends in the South have been in the direction of reducing, not increasing the tenant's share, especially in connection with the mechanization of Southern agriculture.

A recently published Agriculture Department Study on rental arrangements in the Southern Piedmont cotton area—covering parts of the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama—showed that of 363 landlord-tenant arrangements, 315 provided a 50-50 split, 37 provided for the tenant to get less than 50%, and 11 provided for him to get more than 50%. With one exception, these 11 were share-tenants who provided their own workstock and two-thirds of the expenses. In addition, many of those getting but half the crop were share-tenants supplying their own workstock.[12]

In most of the 363 cases, tractors are now used in addition to mules. Almost invariably, this has meant a loss to the cropper, either in the form of higher expenses, or of a smaller share of the crop.

The report shows that in cases where the landlord uses a tractor the cropper must usually pay either all the wages of the driver, or if it is a rented tractor, half the custom rate. The significance of this is revealed by 1950 Census figures which

show that expenses for machine hire were the largest item among those specified on cropper farms (fertilizer not included in the survey). This expense is in addition to the customary half cost of fertilizer and ginning, and half the cost of poison to kill the boll weevil, another "modern" expense added to the burden of the cropper.

If the cropper cannot bear these added burdens he has a "choice":

> For example, arrangement number 8 . . . represents an attempt to solve both the problem arising from the introduction of a tractor and that arising from off-farm work opportunities open to renters. . . . The landlord uses mechanical power to prepare and cultivate the land and pays all the expenses of fertilizer, seed, poison, hauling, ginning, etc. The cropper family furnishes only labor for chopping, hoeing, and picking the crop. In return it receives one-third of the cotton.[13]

This arrangement reduces the cropper's share to one-third of the cotton, *and none of the cottonseed.* That means his actual share is 27.8% of the crop (the cottonseed is worth about one-fifth as much as the lint). In some of the arrangements shown the situation is even worse. Not only is the cropper reduced to one-third of the lint, and 28% of the total crop, but in addition must pay the wages of the tractor driver, and sometimes share in other expenses. In one case the cropper receives only one-fourth of the crop.

This developing scheme of cutting the cropper's share of the crop makes it impossible for the cropper to feed and clothe his family, even on the customary low level, unless some additional source of income is found. The report states:

> With an increasing number of off-farm jobs available, this arrangement may prove increasingly popular with both landlords and croppers. . . . The landlord gets a return on his investment in land and buildings and makes effective use of mechanical power. . . . The cropper gets house rent free and products from use of pasture and garden rights which contribute to lower living costs. There may be an added sense of security in that in the event of unemployment the cropper *may assist his family* in the cotton fields and gain some remuneration for his labor. . . . Through this arrangement the head of many a cropper family becomes in effect a "city worker" with a "home in the country." (My emphasis—V.P.)[14]

In short, the landlord gets his labor at much less than the customary low cost, in the form of the labor of women and chil-

dren, while the husband must find a city job, also at very low wages. Neither farm nor city supplies enough income; the two combined enable the family to get by.

What is the saving of labor to the cropper and his family? One study shows that full mechanization on a South Carolina cotton farm saves the cropper only 20% of his labor.[15] Another study indicates that with the partial mechanization more typical in the southern Piedmont, the saving in labor would barely exceed 5%.[16]

Not only does the cropper family have to do 80% to 90% or more of its former work, but there is no reduction in the burden during the peak work periods of chopping and picking. If the head of the family has a city job, he either has to quit it during these peak periods, or pay the cost of a hired laborer to help his family. In practice, this limits him to casual labor.

The report on the Piedmont area rental arrangements does not distinguish between white and Negro croppers. It would be consistent with the general pattern if the Negro croppers suffer more from reduction below the normal 50% in their share.

The Florida study confirms this supposition. This study sets up the "normal" 50-50 sharing of expenses and receipts, and the other "established," "fair" arrangements for the state of Florida. This corresponds to an index of 100. If the landlord gets more and the tenant less, the index rises above 100. The actual index for Negro croppers in 1949 was 134, for white croppers 109. Thus for the white croppers the situation had deteriorated somewhat, and for the Negro croppers, grossly, from the normal "fair" division. The landlord was even more than normally exploiting the white croppers, and especially the Negro croppers. Similar calculations for share-crop tenants gave an index figure of 108 for whites, 110 for Negroes.[17]

The attempts to cut the cropper's share of the crop with the introduction of machinery contradicts some of the main bases of the sharecropper system. By changing, at least in part, the backward hand-labor methods of work, it may give the cropper more independence through ability to handle machinery. By forcing the cropper to supplement farm income with off-farm work, it weakens the landlord's grip on him. Thus the landlord, in the drive for still higher profits, undermines the social

basis of his high profits, which require the dependence and ignorance of the cropper. For that reason the introduction of machinery is partial, halting and irregular. It varies considerably with the principal crop and from area to area. In Mississippi, where technical conditions favor mechanization, and where white supremacist rule is most solidly entrenched and hence best able to survive these changes, mechanization of cotton culture proceeds more rapidly. In North Carolina where mechanization of tobacco culture is less ripe technically, and where any changes could most easily lead to the Negro croppers freeing themselves altogether from the plantation system, the landlords try to keep things exactly as in the past.

IX. FARM AND FACTORY WAGE WORKERS

ANOTHER GREAT ADVANTAGE of the sharecrop system for the landlord is that it permits the extraction of much greater profits out of the wage labor that is used together with cropper labor, especially in the peak periods. The sharecroppers and their families provide a huge labor reserve, which if necessary can be substituted for outside wage labor by increasing the intensity of their work. Landless rural people and migratory workers in the South are in continual competition with the sharecroppers. The result is a catastrophically low wage rate for farm labor in the South.

Farm wage rates in the South are about half those in the rest of the country. Average wages per day (with house) in 1952 were $4.20 in North Carolina, $3.15 in South Carolina, $3.40 in Georgia, $3.20 in Alabama, $3.35 in Mississippi, and $3.60 in Louisiana. Considering the normal workday of 10 hours, it means a wage of 30-35 cents per hour in most of these states, or less than half the legal minimum hourly wage in industry. Daily farm wages in the rest of the country, outside of the South, ranged from $7 to $8.[1]

The influence of the plantation system in accounting for these low wages can be seen from various statistical evidences. Thus in Florida, where the Negro people are as badly discriminated against as elsewhere in the South, but where there are very few plantations, average daily wages with house were $4.50, or somewhat higher than in the six states studied.

Census statistics divide up each state into economic areas, numbering up to a dozen. Almost invariably, farm wages are highest where there is least sharecropping. In North Carolina, in 1950 in the three areas where average farm wages were highest ($4.14 to $5.48 daily), the proportion of cropper farms to

all commercial farms ranged from 2% to 7%. But in the three areas where average farm wages were lowest ($2.80 to $2.93 daily), the proportion of cropper farms ranged from 16% to 40%.[2]

In general, the lowest wage areas are the areas with the highest proportion of Negro population, because that is where sharecropping usually prevails. But in a few cases this pattern is reversed. In the area above Mobile, Alabama (Census area 7b), with a majority of Negroes in the population, daily farm wages averaged $3.06, third highest in the state. In this area there is little sharecropping (6% croppers). Small peasant farming predominates, among Negroes as well as whites. But in the east-central Piedmont cotton area (Census areas 4 & B), where two-thirds of the farm population is white, farm wages were lowest in the state, $2.11 daily. Here sharecropping is extensive, with cropper farms 18% of all commercial units.[3]

Thus the low Southern farm wages, which are largely a form of discrimination against the Negro people, are as low as they are because here that discrimination is directly linked to the plantation-sharecropper system. And because of the economic basis, the extreme Southern farm wage differential affects with little less force the minority of white farm laborers.

The case of the Canton family of Southern Arkansas illustrates the use of the cropper system to depress farm wages. The Cantons are croppers on the 35-family cotton plantation of the Cassanova Corporation:

> All tenants on the plantation are required to work the company crop for wages when they have completed work on their own crop. Last year the operator paid his tenants $2 a day for chopping; however, laborers brought from outside cities and communities were paid $4 and $7. When the families have finished working their crop and any work elsewhere on the plantation, the operator will give them permission to work off the place.[4]

A footnote explains that when two young men went to work elsewhere for higher wages without the landlord's permission, the corporation stole their crops and drove them off the plantation.

The point is not so much that the croppers are paid lower wages for their work off their own plot than outside farm labor-

ers. The main thing is that the landlord, by his complete control over the time of the cropper, has the lever by which he can drag down the wages of outside laborers—trucked in from Memphis, for example—to $4 per day or less.

Southern farm employers spend about a billion dollars a year in cash wages paid to farm labor. If the wage rate in the rest of the country were paid, they would spend two billion. Thus the farm wage differential, based on the cropper-plantation form of exploitation, and the oppression of the Negro people in conjunction with it, yields a direct extra profit of a billion dollars yearly.

However, this is just part of the story. Southern agriculture is closely connected with Southern industry. The cotton from the plantations goes into the Southern mills as do the surplus working people from the Southern farms. The pressure of millions of underpaid rural people on the towns is enormous. It makes possible the notorious Southern industrial wage differential. And this is true despite the fact that Negro workers are largely excluded from the Southern textile mills. The "monopoly" of jobs of the white workers does not insulate them from the effects of rural poverty; partly because this poverty affects the majority of the white rural population, and partly because the white mill-owner, now excluding the Negro to make the underpaid white worker satisfied with his "superior" status, threatens implicitly to bring in the Negro in case of "difficulties" with the white workers.

Runaway Shops

The nationwide implications of Southern rural exploitation are becoming more and more clear. With the growth of migratory farm labor, northern capitalist farmers are able to use underpaid Southern migratory workers, mainly Negro, to pull down northern farm wage rates. Manufacturers are more and more using the device of the runaway shop to pull down northern wages. The northern textile workers learned this all too well during 1952, when their wages were cut 6.5% during an inflationary period. The employers shamelessly claimed that they could not compete with the lower-wage Southern plants, although in many cases they themselves were owners of Southern plants,

established precisely for the purpose of lowering wages, North and South.

The decline of the plantation-sharecropper system does not lessen its pressure on wage labor, country and town. On the contrary, for the moment it increases the pressure, as the ranks of those displaced from the plantations are swelled.

The *New York Times* of February 8, 1953, contains as an entire special section a runaway shop advertisement put out by Dixiecrat Governor Byrnes and his South Carolina associates. Here, in part, is how this advertisement explains the advantages of South Carolina for industrialists:

> At the outset, the supply of employees is more than adequate at almost any location in the State. Today 798,177 peiple make up the labor force of South Carolina. This is because the mechanization of farms has caused thousands to seek positions in industry. It is estimated that for every farm job available, 14 persons from farm backgrounds must seek other employment. . . .
>
> Coming as they do from small towns and rural areas, the people of South Carolina who seek places in industry are sound-thinking, conservative, honest, and free from the foreign ideologies which have wrought turmoil elsewhere. They know the value of hard work, and are eager to give a good day's work for a fair day's pay. . . .
>
> As a result, they are highly productive and quick to learn new skills. Almost every plant manager faced with placing a new plant in production has been astounded by the rapidity with which South Carolinians acquire the skill and know-how which make for profitable production. Most of them have thrown away their production "time tables" after witnessing the abilities of the South Carolina worker.[5]

American labor cannot maintain its position without the organization of Southern labor. Southern labor cannot be successfully organized without the organization of Southern farm labor, both wage and sharecropper, both Negro and white, on a basis of unity and equality.

The close links between southern agriculture and Southern labor have been strengthened in post-war years. A substantial proportion of the farm population has been shifting from purely agricultural occupations to part-time farming and part-time industrial work. An increasing number of industrial workers are also part-time farmers.

Farmers Become Wage Workers

During the post-war period well over 100,000 southern farmers have been converted into worker-farmers, in addition to those completely thrown off the land. The 1945 Census showed 276,000 farm operators working off their farm for some period during the year in the six southern states studied. The 1950 Census showed 450,000 in this category, or three out of every 8 farm operators. This increase since 1945 followed a fifteen year decline from 1930 to 1945. The decline had been solely among those farmers working short periods during the year off the farm —such as sharecroppers working on the landlord's home farm during the peak season.

The most remarkable increase has been in the number of farm operators spending most of their time—200 days a year or more—at work off their farm. There were about 194,000 of these in 1950, as compared with 114,000 in 1945, and 60,000 in 1930. Obviously, one who works 200 days a year or more off his farm is essentially a worker living in the country. The number of such workers has been increasing gradually since 1930. The pace quickened during the years of World War II, when factory employment rose in the southern states. But the most rapid rise was in the period after World War II, when there was no increase, or even a decrease, in southern factory employment.

Characteristics of the worker-farmers can be studied by examining the data for a particular state—South Carolina, for example. For this purpose, reference will generally be made to farmers working off their farms 100 days or more per year, since detailed statistics are not given for those working 200 days or more.

Who are the worker-farmers?

They are mainly white farmers. In South Carolina 31% of the white farmers, and only 14% of the Negro farmers, worked off the farm 100 days or more per year.[6] Worker-farming is more widespread among white farmers because jobs in southern industry are mainly reserved for whites.

The worker-farmers are mainly non-commercial farmers. Of the 32,768 farmers who worked off their farms 100 days or more in South Carolina in 1950, 83% were classified as non-commercial

farmers. An easy majority of the white non-commercial farmers were worker-farmers.[7]

Finally, the worker-farmers are mainly farm owners or cash renters—that is, independent farmers. This cannot be illustrated precisely because the Census does not give details according to tenure for non-commercial farmers, among whom the worker-farmers are concentrated. But it is clearly indicated by the available data. Of the white non-commercial farmers four-fifths are independent farmers, only one-fifth sharecroppers. Since the majority of the non-commercial white farmers are worker-farmers, most of these must be independent farmers. Fully 57% of the white full owners, but only 24% of the white crop-share tenants, are non-commercial. Similarly, of the white farmers in commercial classes I-V, 19% of the full owners but only 6% of the croppers are worker-farmers.[8] Statistics for Negro farmers show the same general pattern.

Since there are few cash tenants in the South, these facts show that the worker-farmers are primarily poor farm owners.

Now it is possible to prove the assertion made in Chapter II, that the increase in white farm ownership shown by the Census for the 1940-50 decade is a statistical trick (*not* deliberate deception on the part of the Census statisticians, who merely adhere to the standard definitions, but on the part of the politicians and apologists who use these statistics uncritically). The following examples show the clear connection between the statistical increase in farm ownership and the increase in the number of worker-farmers.

1. Between 1945 and 1950 the number of full owners increased in 17 South Carolina counties. In these counties the number of farm operators working off their farms 100 days or more increased 102%. In the other 29 counties the number of full owners decreased. In these counties the number of farm operators working off their farms 100 days or more increased only 26%.[9]

2. Because of the differences in presentation of data, it is impossible to directly compare work off farm by tenure of operator in different Censuses. But a rough indication is provided by comparing the number of farmers doing any off-farm work as shown by the 1940 Census, with the number of non-commercial

farmers as shown by the 1950 Census. This comparison shows that the increases were almost exclusively among the full owners and that the increases were greater among the white than among the Negro owners.

Among white full owners in South Carolina, there were almost three times as many classified as non-commercial in 1950 as worked off their farms in 1940. The corresponding increase for Negro full owners was twofold. But among tenants, both white and Negro, there was little change.[10]

It is this which explains the rise in farm ownership in the Southern states between 1940 and 1950. This rise is acclaimed in official propaganda as a symbol of the victory of the family-type farm, of the strengthening of American small farmers, of the help of the Government to the farmers, etc. But actually, in the six states combined, while there was an increase of 73,000 in the number of independent farmers over the decade, there was an increase of 112,000 in the number of farmers working off their farms more than 200 days a year, in the worker-farmers; and almost all of this increase was among the owners and cash tenants. *Thus the number of independent farmers who were mainly farmers, who made their living by agriculture, declined by some* 39,000.

This decline and more occurred during the years since World War II. Between 1940 and 1945 the number of independent farmers increased 60,000, the number working off farms 200 days or more increased 33,000, leaving a net increase of 27,000 in the number of independent farmers who were mainly farmers. Between 1945 and 1950 the number of independent farmers increased 14,000, the number working off farms 200 days or more increased almost 80,000, leaving a net decrease of 66,000 in the number of independent farmers who were mainly farmers.

Thus, during the war years a certain number of poor farm laborers, croppers, etc., were able to become farm owners. In addition many workers able to save money because of overtime payments and regular employment put their savings into buying small plots of land, so that they could supplement their incomes by raising their own food, and avoid monthly payment of rent. They became worker-farmers.

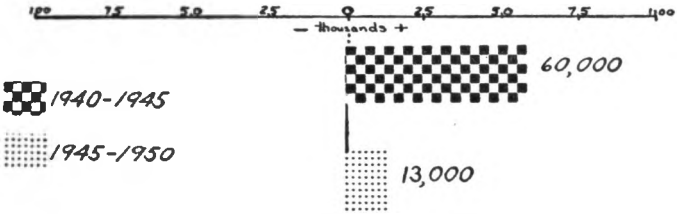
After the war a number of veterans returning from the armed

APPARENT AND ACTUAL CHANGES IN NUMBERS OF INDEPENDENT FARMERS

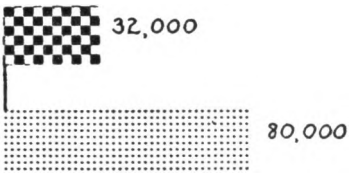
SIX SOUTHERN STATES

1940-1950

THE CENSUS STATISTICS SHOW THESE APPARENT GAINS IN NUMBERS OF INDEPENDENT FARMERS:



BUT, INCLUDED WERE THESE INCREASES IN THE NUMBER OF WORKER-FARMERS:



SO THAT, ACTUALLY, THERE WAS ONLY A GAIN FROM 1940 TO 1945, FOLLOWED BY A BIG LOSS FROM 1945 TO 1950 IN THE NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT FARMERS WHOSE MAIN OCCUPATION WAS FARMING:

forces took a similar course. But more important, as farm incomes began to decline, many small "independent" farmers, rather than lose their property, went to work in the factories and mills, leaving their families to raise subsistence produce on the farm, where they, the worker-farmers, could also work weekends and holidays. They ceased to be actual "independent farmers," became converted into wage earners living in the country. The number of small "family-type" independent farmers, instead of increasing, decreased. At the same time, additional workers, already in the city—perhaps they had at one time been farmers—bought plots of land to help meet the post-war inflation and low wages.

Where Are the Worker-Farmers Employed?

Among white males residing on farms but working elsewhere during the 1950 Census week, 53% worked as operatives and craftsmen, the typical industrial occupations. Another 22% worked as non-farm managers, professionals and white collar workers. Only 21% worked as farm or other laborers. The white farm women working off the farm were almost all either factory workers or white collar workers.

Among Negro males residing on farms but working elsewhere only 22% worked as operatives or craftsmen, and 3% as professionals and white collar workers. About 73% worked as laborers, most of these as farm laborers and many of the remainder in fact as other rural laborers—on the roads, at the landlord's "peckerwood mill," etc. Negro farm women working off their farms are mainly divided between two groups—private household workers and farm wage laborers.[11]

Thus white worker-farmers are mainly employed in industry in towns, Negro worker-farmers are mainly employed on other farms or in rural industries. The same distinction is clear from the different kind of manufacturing industries in which white and Negro worker-farmers are employed; 65% of the white manufacturing worker-farmers worked in textile mills, the principal industry of South Carolina, and a Jim-Crow industry with but a handful of Negro workers. But 70% of the Negro manufacturing worker-farmers were employed in furniture and lumber and

wood products industries, that is, in the rural sawmills, lumbering and woodworking operations.[12]

Why has the expansion in the number of worker-farmers been so rapid since World War II? The main impetus has been the rampant inflation generated by preparations for a new war, now reinforced by declining prices of farm products, the building of war factories in the South, and the investment of profits from the inflationary war economy in farmland, at the expense of the "independent", "family-sized" farmer.

I. W. Duggan, Governor of the Farm Credit Administration, at the 1951 Tuskegee Conference, at which he talked of the family-sized farm as the "cornerstone of democracy," described what is really going on:

> We are developing another period of land inflation. There is pressure from groups of people to buy farms around cities. Workers want to get away from the city to do part-time farming to supplement their income or lower their cost of living. And they're buying poor land at inflated prices [that is the worker-farmers.—V.P.].
>
> Then there's the group of people who'd like to get away from the congested cities to enjoy life, etc. They're buying the better farms at inflated prices. Another group wants to get away from the possibility of being bombed out. They're moving out of the cities and also buying the better farms at inflated prices [that is, the "gentleman farmers," buying up some of the land from which the Negro farmers are being driven.—V.P.]
>
> Then we have the group of people who have accumulated some funds and want to invest in real estate. They're interested in buying land for investment [the absentee owners who now own four times as much land as all the Negro farmers in the South.—V.P.] As a result we have land values. In 1920 the index reached a post-war peak and was 177. It was 179 in November 1950.[13]

As a result it becomes more and more difficult for the Negro farmer—or poor white—to finance purchase of the land.

Dr. Arthur Raper, liberal economist of the Department of Agriculture, tries to convince Negro farmers that the developing war economy offers them a satisfactory alternative to the land they cannot get:

> Under the present defense program, more industrial goods will be needed, and industry will increase in the South because it is here that there is the greatest pool of under-used labor. The South is the area—if and when we begin pushing toward anything that approximates a battle for survival—that industry will seek, and as industry expands an increasing proportion of Negroes are going to be part-time farmers or live wholly by off-farm work.[14]

But as we have seen, and as was pointed out in the same conference, "the Negroes who need most to work off their farms . . . have the least employment elsewhere."[15]

Because of discrimination in employment and wages Negro part-time farmers who can get off-farm work gain little from it. This is shown by an Agriculture Department study of off-farm work in three North Carolina counties. White part-time small farmers earned an average of $2,013 from off-farm work in 1950, but Negro part-time small farmers earned an average of only $1,038. The average daily wage for off-farm work was $8.55 for white males, $6.77 for white females, $6.58 for Negro males, and $2.14 for Negro females.[16]

For the poor white farmers able to obtain off-farm work, the additional income raises their total revenues to those of a lower middle farmer. Off-farm work means a definite improvement in material conditions, although at the expense of extremely intensive labor to carry the two jobs. For the Negro farmer, with his low off-farm wages, this additional work may merely provide the margin for subsistence.

Lewis W. Jones, Director of Research, Rural Life Council, Tuskegee Institute, showed the cost in inhuman toil of the higher cash income and ability to purchase appliances that comes with worker-farming, or "part-time" farming:

> Well, in choosing our community, we had to find one where the Negroes had the opportunity to work in industry. Because you know, in much of the South where there is part time farming no opportunity is given Negro farmers in those industries, particularly in our textile areas. But up in the Tennessee Valley where we found our community, the Reynolds Metal Company and the Tennessee Valley Authority fertilizer plants employ Negroes, and some of them travel as far as 35 to 40 miles and back each day to work in those plants. Of course, the family works the farm, and in off time the farmer works. They have a special schedule so that when the man works until midnight, he then sleeps. The next day he works on the crop with his family. He takes a seasonal layoff when the farm needs him. They have numerous electrical appliances—deep freezers, refrigerators, etc. —and most of them own their own homesteads . . . even though they rented farm land for the family to work while they were engaged in the industrial plants.[17]

For the landlords, the growing class of worker-farmers constitutes a safety valve, a temporary solution for the most active of the rural poor, who might otherwise be leaders in the struggle

for sufficient land to provide a livelihood. For the city employers, this class provides the best downward lever on wage costs. Because they provide part of their own subsistence on the farm, and obtain small cash incomes from farming, their needs for adequate wage rates in industry appear less urgent than those of the workers residing in the towns, who must buy all of their necessities with wages. Because of their ties to the land, they are less mobile, less likely to seek better jobs elsewhere.

For all of the southern rulers, they provide a new form of discrimination between white and Negro, a new way of seeking to divide the poor whites from the Negroes in the countryside.

X. WHAT FUTURE FOR SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE?

IN EARLIER CHAPTERS it was shown that the changes in southern agriculture do not signify land reform. The number of owner-operators of family-sized farms is diminishing along with the number of sharecroppers and regularly employed farm wage laborers. Agriculture is increasingly concentrated in large farms, and absentee ownership is growing. Mechanization, not accessible to the poor, makes it harder for farmers to compete, for sharecroppers to become farm owners. Small individual farms become more specialized, more dependent on the fate of markets for particular products. The slave-like sharecropping system remains the principal form of exploitation in the cotton and tobacco regions of the South. In every respect the disadvantages of the Negro farm population are increased. Negro farm people are being driven off the land at a faster rate. Poor white farm people are losing their grip on the soil, becoming industrial workers.

In many respects, agriculture in the old South resembles that in the backward areas of the world, in the colonies and semi-colonies of imperialism. The majority of the white farm people, and especially the overwhelming majority of the Negro farm people, suffer social and economic conditions akin to those of the oppressed peasantry of Asian and Latin American countries.

Is Sharecropping Vanishing?

The most drastic change since the end of World War II has been the decline in farm employment. While technical changes have increased greatly the productive capacity of southern land and workers, market changes have caused a decline in the principal crop, cotton. Cotton acreage in the old

South has been reduced, and labor requirements per acre have also been reduced. A number of reasons lie behind this: the stagnation of the domestic market for cotton, the decline of the foreign market for cotton, the increased yield of cotton achieved through more application of fertilizer and use of pesticides, substitution of machine power for human labor, and finally, especially since the end of World War II, the phenomenal growth of mechanized, irrigated cotton production in Arizona and California.

Over the past quarter century the yield of cotton has increased about 60%. It has risen least in the Southeast, but considerably even there. In Mississippi as much cotton is being produced as during the late 1920's on barely half the acreage.

The share of the southeastern states in the cotton crop has been reduced from 35% in 1930 to 19% in 1952. The share of the Delta area, which reached a peak during World War II, declined from 40% in 1944 to 33% in 1952. At the same time the share of the Far West rose from 5% in 1944 to 22% in 1952, and now exceeds that of the Southeast—the traditional cotton center.[1]

The decline in employment of sharecroppers since its peak in 1930 almost exactly parallels the decline in cotton acreage. In Alabama, between 1930 and 1950, acreage planted to cotton fell 63%, the number of croppers 62%. In Mississippi, over the same interval, cotton acreage declined 50%, the number of croppers 45%. In North Carolina tobacco acreage fell 12%, the number of croppers 17%.[2]

This close parallel emphasizes the fact that the decline in the number of sharecroppers signifies not reform, but unemployment. Actually, owing to crop allocations, cotton plantings in 1950 were unusually low, and increased somewhat in subsequent years. It is quite possible that 1951 and 1952 saw a certain increase in employment of sharecroppers, although there is no evidence available.

Over the long run, the number of sharecroppers is likely to continue to decline with cotton culture in the old South. Will sharecropping disappear as a major factor without any agrarian reform? This is not likely.

One technical advance which most clearly undermines the sharecropping system is the mechanical cotton picker. This

eliminates the need for the largest part of the hand labor in cotton growing. But the plantation system itself retards this technical advance. Cropper labor (and wage labor associated with the plantation system) is so cheap that the saving in labor costs through use of the mechanical picker scarcely compensates for the loss in yield (not all the cotton is obtained with the mechanical picker). And the cotton picker is very expensive, requiring a large additional outlay of capital, so that the rate of profit on total capital is actually reduced in most cases in comparison with use of cropper labor.

In 1946 only 0.4% of the U.S. cotton crop was mechanically harvested. In 1952 one-fourth of the crop was machine-picked. But this national average conceals wide regional differences. In the Far West, over half of all cotton was mechanically picked in 1952. The percentage was nearly as large in the Texas-Oklahoma area. In the middle South (including the Mississippi Delta), less than one-tenth of the cotton was mechanically picked. In the Southeast only 2% of the crop was harvested by machinery.[3]

Technical factors have something to do with this difference. The Far West, with its dry climate and level fields, is ideally suited to the cotton picker. The Delta area has excessive moisture which leads to losses when the cotton picker is used. The Southeast, with its hilly, broken fields, is not well-suited to the standard cotton harvester. But these technical obstacles could be and are being overcome.

The main obstacles are social, and are not so easily overcome. An example of this is in the High Plains of Texas, where inexpensive mechanical strippers are used. Here the procedure for many landlords is to strip cotton mechanically on their home farms, but to provide by contract that the tenants (on various forms of share contract) pick by hand, so that the landlords will get the maximum of cotton from the tenant units.[4]

George C. Cortright had 1,000 acres under cotton on his Mississippi plantation. His three cotton pickers were capable of picking the entire crop. But he had the machines pick only 606 bales, while his sharecroppers picked 764 bales. Why? Because "back-breaking hoe-labor" is still needed to control weeds and grass, and because: "Mr. Cortright had to have the tenants

on hand for the vital six to eight weeks when weed control was needed; to let them earn enough money to live on, he had 764 bales hand-picked. In a situation like this there just isn't much inducement to buy machines, particularly standard-sized harvesters at $8,000 to $12,000 each."[5]

Poor Mr. Cortright! When he uses his cotton-pickers, his costs are $31.90 per bale for weed-control, $13.50 for picking, a total of $45.40. When he uses hand-labor, the costs are $31.90 for weed-control, $49.35 for picking, a total of $81.25. To keep the sharecroppers occupied, he absorbs an added cost of $36 a bale on the hand-picked cotton. So it seems. But it turns out that without the sharecroppers tied to the land, relying only on free labor, his wage costs would be at least doubled. The cost for weed-control plus mechanical picking, instead of $45.40, would be at least $90.80, or far above his present average cost.

To a certain extent, sharecroppers are being replaced by low-paid Mexican and Puerto Rican migratory labor. But it is unlikely that such labor will substantially replace sharecropping in the old South, where the use of wage labor in general is limited by the plantation system.

The further decline of eastern cotton production is slowed by the production quota system, imposed in times of crop surplus, which gives limited protection to the less efficient eastern producers, and prevents their retreat before the West from becoming an utter rout.

Thus the plantation system is declining, but is not likely to die out of its own weight. It is declining not through any reform, not through any victory of "family-size" farming, not through the acquisition of land by the Negro rural population, but through the decay of Southern agriculture, through the substitution of impoverished, terribly exploited, semi-captive migratory Mexican labor in California for impoverished, terribly exploited, semi-captive Negro cropper labor in Georgia, through the conversion of some Negro croppers into homeless farm laborers, through the increased exploitation of Negro farm labor and the driving of the resulting "surplus" off the land to the cities where they cannot get good jobs and face the prospect of mass unemployment and hunger in the next depression.

American "Junkerism"

The most penetrating studies of agriculture under modern capitalism, both in the United States and Russia, were made by V. I. Lenin. Speaking of the feudal obstacles to agriculture in tsarist Russia, he wrote: "And it is absolutely necessary to remove these obstacles to the development of the productive forces of the country—necessary not only in the subjective sense of the word, but also in the objective sense, *i.e.*, this removal is inevitable, and no power on earth can prevent it."[6]

The question is how, and at what pace. Lenin discussed two ways in which capitalism in agriculture could develop: "the Prussian path and the American path."

> Prussian landlordism was not crushed by the bourgeois revolution; it survived and became the basis of Junker economy, which is capitailst at bottom, but which still keeps the rural population in a certain degree of dependence. . . . As a consequence, the social and political domination of the Junker was strengthened for many decades after 1848 and the development of the productive forces of German agriculture proceeded very much more slowly than in America."[7]

Here in the United States, the traditional home of "the free economy of the free farmer working on free land"[8] as the basis of capitalist development, the Prussian style of development predominates in an important part of the country, providing the economic basis for the political power of the American Junkers, the Byrneses, Clays, Gen. Clarks, Gen. Van Fleets, etc.

The boom of World War II and subsequent war preparations gave southern landlordism a new lease on life by raising the price of cotton and increasing the profit from the exploitation of sharecropper and wage labor. At the same time this boom accelerated the technical development of southern agriculture. As large-scale purely capitalist farming grew at an unprecedented pace for the South, and as modern technique penetrated the home farms of the plantations, the anachronism of semi-slave, hand and mule labor on the sharecropper units became more acute.

The southern Junkers and the monopolies in which they are merged strive in every way to maintain the obsolete social relations which give them the highest profits. They resort to all sorts of devices to overcome the contradictions in the situation.

Sometimes they use tractors on sharecropper units. Other times, like Mr. Cortright, they let their mechanical pickers stand idle while the croppers pick the crop by hand.

These attempts cannot succeed forever. But in the meantime they are at the expense of the Negro people in the South. They are rapidly decreasing their employment, reducing the land they can till, while providing no real alternative.

The ten million Negroes living in the South, the majority in the countryside, cannot accept such a "Prussian" solution.

They will not vanish through migration. As shown in Chapter I, the rapid migration of World War II prevented a further increase in the southern Negro population, but did not lead to a decrease. Moreover, the age structure creates conditions for a new increase in Negro population in the next generation. Their problems will not be solved through the industrialization of the South by the Wall Street-landlord combination, because Negro workers are consigned to the periphery of southern industry, much more than in the North. And in any event, the growth of southern industry is based on war contracts, and run-away shops, and is not yet leading to the general, all-around industrialization of the old South.

Thus the need of the Negro people for land will remain. With the next depression it will become more urgent.

The Way Out

How can their needs be met?

First, there must be real land reform in the old South. To accomplish this, land held by giant operators and absentee owners can be transferred to the tillers. Here is an official description of the U.S.-sponsored land reform in Japan:

> Certain aspects of the land-tenure system in Japan prior to World War II were highly undemocratic and were a source of much social unrest. . . . It was the determined policy of the Allied Occupation to encourage the new Government of Japan to initiate fundamental land-reform measures.
>
> The result was that legislation was enacted in October 1946 requiring that virtually all agricultural land in Japan owned by absentee landlords be purchased at fixed prices—not confiscated—by the Government and sold to tenants. Terms of sale were fixed at a level within the means of tenants to purchase land. Landlords residing on the land were permitted to retain small acreages. . . .

In a program characterized by orderly progress, almost entirely without violence, about one-third of the total cultivated land of Japan passed into the hands of more than three million working cultivators.[9]

It is not the purpose here to expose the fraudulent features of this MacArthur reform, to show why the peasants as landowners may not be better off than before, to show how the landlords still dominate the Japanese countryside. But it is right to insist that—as a minimum—a program of the type advertised be carried out in the South of the United States primarily for the benefit of the Negro people in the countryside, but also for the white sharecroppers and farm laborers. In the six states studied, the land now held by absentee-owners, if divided among all Negro sharecroppers and farm wage laborers, would provide 63 acres for each. Huge additional acreages would be provided by setting a limit to the acreage that could be owned by any operator, as was done in the Japanese land reform. From both sources combined at least 60 acres could be provided each Negro and white sharecropper and farm laborer.

Unlike the U.S.-sponsored reforms abroad, the terms of sale must be within the means of the tillers. The U.S. Government must not be substituted as a go-between for the landlord in the exploitation of the rural poor. Annual payments for the land should be small. Very liberal credit should be made available to enable the owner-operators to acquire modern equipment, either individually or through cooperatives.

So long as capitalism remains, no land reform will completely eliminate farm tenancy or wage labor. Indeed, legislation to improve the conditions of farm tenants and wage laborers is essential for the success of any land reform program.

Among the minimum requirements for farm tenants in southern agriculture are writen contracts, government credits at low interest to replace the "furnish" system, and, particularly, a higher percentage of the crop. The Government, which pretends to tell foreign landlords to increase the tenant's share to 70%, should begin at home.

Farm laborers need the full protection of the minimum wage law and the eight-hour day. Child labor should be prohibited in agriculture, as it is in industry. Farm laborers and sharecroppers need protection in the exercise of their rights to organize.

Full social security coverage should be extended to all farm laborers and farmers.

Land reform in the South will not be accomplished without taking serious steps to end discrimination in southern industry. A national Fair Employment Practices law is most vital for the working people of the South, Negro and white. Such a law, with teeth in it, can help the Negro people win real opportunities in the cities, making farming a choice rather than a necessity for those now excluded from decent jobs in industry.

Nobody is going to hand these gains, and others like them, to the Negro and poor white working people on a silver platter. On the contrary, the southern Junkers and their northern monopoly allies will resist them with all means at their disposal. The people require democratic political channels to win their economic needs. All special restrictions on voting in southern states must be prohibited. Federal legislation and court action is required to rapidly eliminate the barriers of segregation which exist in their most pronounced form in the South, and operate to separate Negro and white politically.

The reactionaries talk about "overpopulation" in the rural South, and "overproduction" in southern agriculture.

A broad democratic reform program in the South, in conjunction with a program of peace and people's progress nationally, will greatly ease the problems of southern agriculture.

The supply of meat, milk, eggs, and other vital foodstuffs to the working people of the South can be increased greatly. The programs discussed here will provide the purchasing power to buy that food. The Negro and white farm laborers and sharecroppers, obtaining land, will thus have a market for the products of a diversified agriculture. Advances for the working people as a whole can enlarge the national market for cotton and other farm products.

World peace will be a greater boon to cotton than to any other farm product. Owing to the embargo on trade with socialist countries, exports of cotton in the 1952-53 crop year were barely half those of the previous year. The opening of trade with China, and with the European people's democracies, will provide a great foreign market among hundreds of millions of people who for the first time are creating large-scale industry, and

obtaining decent living standards. They could use and pay for American cotton on a large scale.

In turn, serious steps to eliminate the plantation system and toward liberation of the Negro people will create the base for broadening the scope of Southern industry, especially in the old South. All kinds of consumer goods industries, machinery and metal industries, can arise to supply the new southern market. Instead of one job for every fourteen rural job-seekers (as South Carolina officials now boast), there can be hundreds of thousands of new industrial jobs for the people growing up on the farms who choose to leave agriculture.

Such a program could be won only through the organization of the southern working people into trade unions, the unionization of farm laborers and sharecroppers, the unity of Negro and white people of the South. Further, it requires broad united fronts and coalitions of the workers, Negro and white, with middle sectors of the population, on a common program for a democratic South.

The opposition to be met is very powerful, and national in scope. Consequently, the labor unions, farm organizations, and other people's forces, *nationally* must advance from the sporadic, and discriminatory, organizing attempts to an all-out drive in support of the southern people in their efforts to build their own organizations.

The South should be recognized in *practical* terms as the nation's number one economic problem. The crying needs are the fight for southern land reform, the abolition of discrimination, and full democratic rights for all. Especially important is the right of the Negro people to vote and have complete proportional representation in all elective and appointive offices in every branch of government in city, county, state and nation.

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